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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

MAY/JUNE
1989

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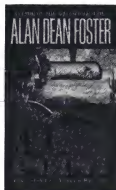


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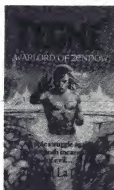
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SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 29

May/June 1989

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Interface

Lee Montgomerie

In this issue Interzone returns to the front lines of the Sex Wars, that sometimes literal No Man's Land last re-notified in force in issue 16. Seven volunteers, both female and male, veterans and raw recruits, have ventured into this treacherous landscape to file despatches from the combat zone. Michael Moorcock announces his enlistment in the feminist forces.

It is a far cry from the days when sf was a professional non-combatant: sometimes claiming diplomatic immunity as a roving ambassador for laissez-faire capitalism and the American Way, more usually just too plain juvenile to enlist; the sexist insignia on its bookstore battle-dress camouflaging the disengaged emotions of a pre-adolescent literature more interested in rocketships than relationships. Science fiction has signed up for the duration, either volunteering from sheer partisanship or conscripted by the likes of Women's Press for its guts and bravado and its skill with the bombshell and the incendiary.

SEX WARS REVISITED

But why should a genre with the freedom of the furthest extremities of space and time and the most outrageous excesses of the imagination involve itself in the well-documented confrontations of two contemporary, earthbound factions? Why bother with the mundane banes of discord and discrimination when the professionals have already built up massive arsenals of matrimonial moaning and feminist fulmination?

Because realistic literature is too slow; its heavy artillery restricted to major highways founded on the compacted hardcore of its authors' past lives and previous reading matter. It is always in the rearguard and all too often bogged down in the mud of long ago, unable to penetrate the minefield of technological and political booby-traps into which the biological juggernaut has backed itself. Only the lightweight guerrilla forces of sf can get there in time to relieve the individual attacked on all flanks by the conflicting directives of heart, mind, hormones, genes and indoctrination; and only sf's armoury of intellectual provocation can pierce our defences against the ranting pamphleteer.

So welcome to Interzone's latest dossier of reports from the heart of the conflict. You won't find any headline

propaganda, heavyweight memoirs or militaristic bumph here, just seven stimulating tragicomedies from that theatre of war in which we are all actors, and of which we are all potential casualties.

(Lee Montgomerie)

DISCH VS. STRIEBER — AGAIN

We did promise the first of our new series of essays on "The Big Sellers" for this issue, but I'm afraid it ain't here. We decided to use the space to bring you part two of **Thomas M. Disch's** ongoing dissection of the oeuvre of UFO-enthusiast **Whitley Strieber** instead. As well as being shorter, we think it's funnier than the first piece (see IZ 25) so we're confident you'll enjoy it. The "Big Sellers" series will definitely commence next issue, probably with an essay on **Douglas Adams** (who happens to come first in the alphabet in any case).

Also next issue, we should have the detailed results of our readers' questionnaire (see IZ 27) and the announcement of the first winners of the Interzone Annual Awards. Among other good fiction, there will be a story by **J.G. Ballard**, which we're sorry we couldn't squeeze into this "Sex Wars" issue (though it may well have fitted in thematic terms), and an interview with **John Sladek**, whose funny new novel *Bugs* is due out from Macmillan later this month. So don't miss all these fine things. Place a subscription, or pester your newsagent.

THE MAKING OF MANY TRILOGIES

Our sourpuss columnist **Charles Platt** will no doubt be delighted to hear (see his "The Triumph of Whimsy," IZ 27) that **Tad Williams's** big fantasy trilogy *Memory, Sorrow and Thorn* has recently been bought in the UK by **Deborah Beale of Century Hutchinson/Legend** for a colossal £260,000 advance. The first volume, entitled *The Dragonbone Chair*, will be published this August in hardcover and trade paperback. It's set in an imaginary medieval Europe, and the publishers are "convinced that Williams will become the world's premier fantasy author of the nineties." It'll be interesting to see whether they're right.

Tad Williams is a 31-year-old American, best known for his animal fantasy *Tailchaser's Song*, and his presumably gleeful British agent is **Pamela Buckmaster** of the **Carnell Literary Agency**. (Eat your heart out, Charles.)

Mind-boggling advances seem to be the order of the day, though. I've also heard that hitherto-unproven novelist **David Wingrove** has sold a whopping series of sf books to **Hodder/NEL** for a total advance of £125,000. Apparently it's a seven-volume saga about a future Chinese-dominated world, and it has also been sold in America for a sum commensurate with the British advance. Not bad going for an author whose main claim to fame is that he was **Brian Aldiss's** junior partner in the writing of the critical history *Trillion-Year Spree*. The sf world (or the British part of it, at any rate) eagerly awaits the opportunity to assess Mr Wingrove's fictional skills.

And they say it's hard for new, young writers. Well, maybe it is. **Eric Brown** toiled for years before he sold his first short story to Interzone. Now I'm pleased to announce that a whole collection of them has been bought by **Martin Fletcher** at **Sphere Books** for publication in the spring of 1990. **Eric's** debut volume, *The Time-Lapsed Man and Other Stories*, will probably appear at the same time as the paperback edition of IZ writer **Paul J. McAuley's** first novel, *Four Hundred Billion Stars*, which **Sphere Books** have just acquired from **Gollancz**. Meanwhile, **Gollancz** have bought **McAuley's** second novel, *Secret Harmonies* (forthcoming in the USA from **Del Rey as Of the Fall**), for publication this autumn. Good going, fellers.

OTHER FOLKS' MAGAZINES

It's not really my wish to fill all these editorial/news columns with comments on rival publications, but there's too much going on for me to turn a blind eye to it all. There's certainly a busy publishing scene right now in science fiction and fantasy. By the time you read this, the first issue of the new British sf quarterly **The Gate** should have been on sale for a while. See the advert on page 22 of our issue 28. I haven't seen a copy of *The Gate* at this moment of writing, but I welcome its appearance on principle: the more markets there are, the more good new sf writers are likely to emerge. A plethora of magazines has a tonic effect on the younger authors especially; indeed, several of my acquaintance

Continued on page 74

Greg Egan The Cutie

“Why won't you even talk about it?” Diane rolled away from me and assumed a foetal position. “We talked about it two weeks ago. Nothing's changed since then, so there's no point, is there?”

We'd spent the afternoon with a friend of mine, his wife, and their two-month-old daughter. Now I couldn't close my eyes without seeing again the expression of joy and astonishment on that beautiful child's face, without hearing her peals of innocent laughter, without feeling once again the strange giddiness that I'd felt when Rosalie, the mother, had said “Of course you can hold her.”

I had hoped that the visit would sway Diane. Instead, while leaving her untouched, it had multiplied a thousandfold my own longing for parenthood, intensifying it into an almost physical pain.

Okay, okay, so it's biologically programmed into us to love babies. So what? You could say the same about ninety per cent of human activity. It's biologically programmed into us to enjoy sexual intercourse, but nobody seems to mind about that, nobody claims they're being tricked by wicked nature into doing what they otherwise would not have done. Eventually someone is going to spell out, step by step, the physiological basis of the pleasure of listening to Bach, but will that make it, suddenly, a “primitive” response, a biological con-job, an experience as empty as the high from a euphoric drug?

“Didn't you feel anything when she smiled?”

“Frank, shut up and let me get some sleep.”

“If we have a baby, I'll look after her. I'll take six months off work and look after her.”

“Oh, six months, very generous! And then what?”

“Longer then. I could quit my job for good, if that's what you want.”

“And live on what? I'm not supporting you for the rest of your life! Shut! I suppose you'll want to get married then, won't you?”

“All right, I won't quit my job. We can put her in child care when she's old enough. Why are you so set against it? Millions of people are having children every day, it's such an ordinary thing, why do you keep manufacturing all these obstacles?”

“Because I do not want a child. Understand? Simple as that.”

I stared up at the dark ceiling for a while, before saying with a not-quite-even voice, “I could carry it, you know. It's perfectly safe these days, there've been thousands of successful male pregnancies. They could take the placenta and embryo from you after a

couple of weeks, and attach it to the outer wall of my bowel.”

“You're sick.”

“They can even do the fertilization and early development in vitro, if necessary. Then all you'd have to do is donate the egg.”

“I don't want a child. Carried by you, carried by me, adopted, bought, stolen, whatever. Now shut up and let me sleep.”

When I arrived home the next evening, the flat was dark, quiet, and empty. Diane had moved out; the note said she'd gone to stay with her sister. It wasn't just the baby thing, of course; everything about me had begun to irritate her lately.

I sat in the kitchen drinking, wondering if there was any way of persuading her to come back. I knew that I was selfish: without a constant, conscious effort, I tended to ignore what other people felt. And I never seemed to be able to sustain that effort for long enough. But I did try, didn't I? What more could she expect?

When I was very drunk, I phoned her sister, who wouldn't even put her on. I hung up, and looked around for something I could break, but then all my energy vanished and I lay down right there on the floor. I tried to cry, but nothing happened, so I went to sleep instead.

The thing about biological drives is, we're so easily able to fool them, so skilled at satisfying our bodies while frustrating the evolutionary reasons for the actions that give us pleasure. Food with no nutritional value can be made to look and taste wonderful. Sex that can't cause pregnancy is every bit as good, regardless. In the past, I suppose a pet was the only way to substitute for a child. That's what I should have done: I should have bought a cat.

A fortnight after Diane left me, I bought the Cutie kit, by EFT from Taiwan. Well, when I say “from Taiwan” I mean the first three digits of the EFT code symbolized Taiwan; sometimes that means something real, geographically speaking, but usually it doesn't. Most of these small companies have no physical premises; they consist of nothing but a few megabytes of data, manipulated by generic software running on the international trade network. A customer phones their local node, specifies the company and the product code, and if their bank balance or their credit rating checks out, orders are placed with various component manufacturers, shipping

agents, and automated assembly firms. The company itself moves nothing but electrons.

What I really mean is: I bought a cheap copy. A pirate, a clone, a look-alike, a bootleg version, call it what you will. Of course I felt a little guilty, and a bit of a miser, but who can afford to pay five times as much for the genuine, made-in-El Salvador, USA product? Yes, it's ripping off the people who developed the product, who spent all that time and money on R & D, but what do they expect when they charge so much? Why should I have to pay for the cocaine habits of a bunch of Californian speculators who had a lucky hunch ten years ago about a certain biotechnology corporation? Better that my money goes to some fifteen-year-old trade hacker in Taiwan or Hong Kong or Manila, who's doing it all so that his brothers and sisters won't have to screw rich tourists to stay alive.

See what fine motives I had?

The Cutie has a venerable ancestry. Remember the Cabbage Patch Doll? Birth certificate provided, birth defects optional. The trouble was, the things just lay there, and life-like robotics for a doll are simply too expensive to be practical. Remember the Video Baby? The Computer Crib? Perfect realism, so long as you didn't want to reach through the glass and cuddle the child.

Of course I didn't want a Cutie! I wanted a real child! But how? I was thirty-four years old, at the end of one more failed relationship. What were my choices?

I could start searching again for a woman who (a) wanted to have children, (b) hadn't yet done so, and (c) could tolerate living with a shit like me for more than a couple of years.

I could try to ignore or suppress my unreasonable desire to be a father. Intellectually (whatever that means), I had no need for a child; indeed, I could easily think of half a dozen impeccable arguments against accepting such a burden. But (to shamelessly anthropomorphize) it was as if the force that had previously led me to engage in copious sex had finally cottoned on about birth control, and so had cunningly decided to shift my attention one link down the flawed causal chain. As an adolescent dreams endlessly of sex, so I dreamed endlessly of fatherhood.

Or—

O! The blessings of technology! There's nothing like a third option to create the illusion of freedom of choice!

—I could buy a Cutie.

Because Cuties are not legally human, the whole process of giving birth to one, whatever your gender, is simplified immensely. Lawyers are superfluous, not a single bureaucrat needs to be informed. No wonder they're so popular, when the contracts for adoption or surrogacy or even IVF with donor gametes all run to hundreds of pages, and when the child-related clauses in interspersed legal agreements require more negotiations than missile-ban treaties.

The controlling software was downloaded into my terminal the moment my account was debited; the kit itself arrived a month later. That gave me plenty of time to choose the precise appearance I wanted, by playing with the simulation graphics. Blue eyes,

wispy blonde hair, chubby, dimpled limbs, a snub nose...oh, what a stereotyped little cherub we built, the program and I. I chose a "girl," because I'd always wanted a girl, though Cuties don't live long enough for gender to make much of a difference. At the age of four they suddenly, quietly, pass away. The death of the little one is so tragic, so heart-breaking, so cathartic. You can put them in their satin-padded coffins, still wearing their fourth-birthday party clothes, and kiss them goodnight one last time before they're beamed up to Cutie heaven.

Of course it was revolting. I knew it was obscene, I cringed and squirmed inside at the utter sickness of what I was doing. But it was possible, and I find the possible so hard to resist. What's more, it was legal, it was simple, it was even cheap. So I went ahead, step by step, watching myself, fascinated, wondering when I'd change my mind, when I'd come to my senses and call it all off.

Although Cuties originate from human germ cells, the DNA is manipulated extensively before fertilization takes place. By changing the gene that codes for one of the proteins used to build the walls of red blood cells, and by arranging for the pineal, adrenal and thyroid glands (triple backup to leave no chance of failure) to secrete, at the critical age, an enzyme that rips the altered protein apart, infant death is guaranteed. By extreme mutilation of the genes controlling embryonic brain development, sub-human intelligence (and hence their sub-human legal status) is guaranteed. Cuties can smile and coo, gurgle and giggle and babble and dribble, cry and kick and moan, but at their peak they're far stupider than the average puppy. Monkeys easily put them to shame, goldfish out-perform them in certain (carefully chosen) intelligence tests. They never learn to walk properly, or to feed themselves unaided. Understanding speech, let alone using it, is out of the question.

In short, Cuties are perfect for people who want all the heart-melting charms of a baby, but who do not want the prospect of surly six-year-olds, or rebellious teenagers, or middle-aged vultures who'll sit by their parents' death beds, thinking of nothing but the reading of the will.

Pirate copy or not, the process was certainly streamlined: all I had to do was hook up the Black Box to my terminal, switch it on, leave it running for a few days while various enzymes and utility-viruses were tailor-made, then ejaculate into tube A.

Tube A featured a convincingly pseudo-vaginal design and realistically scented inner coating, but I have to confess that despite my lack of conceptual difficulties with this stage, it took me a ludicrous forty minutes to complete it. No matter who I remembered, no matter what I imagined, some part of my brain kept exercising a power of veto. But I read somewhere that a clever researcher has discovered that dogs with their brains removed can still go through the mechanics of copulation; the spinal cord, evidently, is all that's required. Well, in the end my spinal cord came good, and the terminal flashed up a sarcastic **WELL DONE!** I should have put my fist through it. I should have chopped up the Black Box with an axe and run around the room screaming nonsense poems. I should have bought a cat. It's good to have things to regret, though, isn't it? I'm sure it's an essential part of being human.

Three days later, I had to lie beside the Black Box and let it place a fierce claw on my belly. Impregnation was painless, though, despite the threatening appearance of the robot appendage; a patch of skin and muscle was locally anaesthetized, and then a quickly plunging needle delivered a pre-packaged biological complex, shielded by a chorion specially designed for the abnormal environment of my abdominal cavity.

And it was done. I was pregnant.

After a few weeks of pregnancy, all my doubts, all my distaste, seemed to vanish. Nothing in the world could have been more beautiful, more right, than what I was doing. Every day, I summoned up the simulated foetus on my terminal – the graphics were stunning; perhaps not totally realistic, but definitely cute, and that was what I'd paid for, after all – then put my hand against my abdomen and thought deep thoughts about the magic of life.

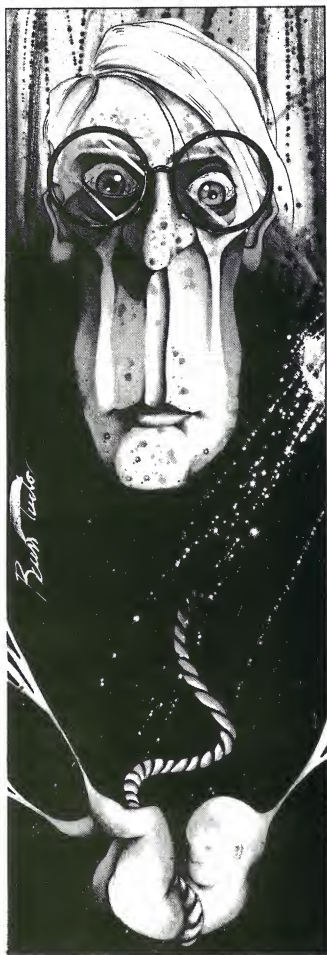
Every month I went to a clinic for ultrasound scans, but I declined the battery of genetic tests on offer; no need for me to discard an embryo with the wrong gender or unsatisfactory eye colour, since I'd dealt with those requirements at the start.

I told no one but strangers what I was doing; I'd changed doctors for the occasion, and I'd arranged to take leave once I started to "show" too severely (up until then I managed to get by with jokes about "too many beers"). Towards the end I began to be stared at, in shops and on the street, but I'd chosen a low birthweight, and nobody could have known for sure that I wasn't merely obese. (In fact, on the advice of the instruction manual, I'd intentionally put on fat before the pregnancy; evidently it's a useful way to guarantee energy for the developing foetus.) And if any one who saw me guessed the truth, so what? After all, I wasn't committing a crime.

During the day, once I was off work, I watched television and read books on child care, and arranged and rearranged the cot and toys in the corner of my room. I'm not sure when I chose the name: Angel. I never changed my mind about it, though. I carved it into the side of the cot with a knife, pretending that the plastic was the wood of a cherry tree. I contemplated having it tattooed upon my shoulder, but then that seemed inappropriate, between father and daughter. I said it aloud in the empty flat, long after my excuse about "trying out the sound" was used up; I picked up the phone every now and then, and said, "Can you be quiet, please! Angel is trying to sleep!"

Let's not split hairs. I was out of my skull. I knew I was out of my skull. I blamed it, with wonderful vagueness, on "hormonal effects" resulting from placental secretions into my bloodstream. Sure, pregnant women didn't go crazy, but they were better designed, biochemically as well as anatomically, for what I was doing. The bundle of joy in my abdomen was sending out all kinds of chemical messages to what it thought was a female body, so was it any wonder that I went a little strange?

Of course there were more mundane effects as well. Morning sickness (in fact, nausea at all hours of the day and night). A heightened sense of smell, and sometimes a distracting hypersensitivity of the skin. Pressure on the bladder, swollen calves. Not to mention the simple, inevitable, exhausting unwieldiness



Illustrations by Russ Tudor

of a body that was not just heavier, but had been reshaped in about the most awkward way I could imagine. I told myself many times that I was learning an invaluable lesson, that by experiencing this state, this process, so familiar to so many women but unknown to all but a handful of men, I would surely be transformed into a better, wiser person.

The night before I checked in to hospital for the Caesarian, I had a dream. I dreamt that the baby emerged, not from me, but from the Black Box. It was covered in dark fur, and had a tail, and huge, lemur-like eyes. It was more beautiful than I had imagined possible. I couldn't decide, at first, if it was most like a young monkey or a kitten, because sometimes it walked on all fours like a cat, sometimes it crouched like a monkey and the tail seemed equally suited to either. Eventually, though, I recalled that kittens were born with their eyes closed, so a monkey was what it had to be.

It darted around the room, then hid beneath the bed. I reached under to drag it out, then found that all I had in my hands was an old pair of pyjamas.

I was woken by an overwhelming need to urinate.

The hospital staff dealt with me without a single joke; well, I suppose I was paying enough not to be mocked. I had a private room (as far from the maternity ward as possible). Ten years ago, perhaps, my story would have been leaked to the media, and cameramen and reporters would have set up camp outside my door. But the birth of a Cutie, even to a single father, was, thankfully, no longer news. Some hundred thousand Cuties had already lived and died, so I was no trail-blazing pioneer; no paper would offer me ten years' wages for the BIZARRE AND SHOCKING story of my life, no TV stations would bid for the right to zoom-in on my tears at the prime-time funeral of my sweet, sub-human child. The permutations of reproductive technology had been milked dry of controversy; researchers would have to come up with a quantum leap in strangeness if they wanted to regain the front page. No doubt they were working on it.

The whole thing was done under general anaesthetic. I woke with a headache like a hammer blow and a taste in my mouth like I'd thrown up rotten cheese. The first time I moved without thinking of my stitches; it was the last time I made that mistake.

I managed to raise my head.

She was lying on her back in the middle of a cot, which now looked as big as a football field. Wrinkled and pink just like any other baby, her face screwed up, her eyes shut, taking a breath, then howling, then another breath, another howl, as if screaming were every bit as natural as breathing. She had thick dark hair (the program had said she would, and that it would soon fall out and grow back fair). I climbed to my feet, ignoring the throbbing in my head, and leant over the wall of the cot to place one finger gently on her cheek. She didn't stop howling, but she opened her eyes, and, yes, they were blue.

"Daddy loves you," I said. "Daddy loves his Angel." She closed her eyes, took an extra-deep breath, then screamed. I reached under and, with terror, with dizzying joy, with infinite precision in every movement, with microscopic care, I lifted her up to my

shoulder and held her there for a long, long time. Two days later they sent us home.

Everything worked. She didn't stop breathing. She drank from her bottle, she wet herself and soiled her nappies, she cried for hours, and sometimes she even slept.

Somehow I managed to stop thinking of her as a Cutie. I threw out the Black Box, its task completed. I sat and watched her watch the glittering mobile I'd suspended above her cot, I watched her learning to follow movements with her eyes when I set it swinging and twisting and tinkling, I watched her trying to lift her hands towards it, trying to lift her whole body towards it, grunting with frustration, but sometimes cooing with enchantment. Then I'd rush up and lean over her and kiss her nose, and make her giggle, and say, again and again, "Daddy loves you! Yes, I do!"

I quit my job when my holiday entitlement ran out. I had enough saved to live frugally for years, and I couldn't face the prospect of leaving Angel with anybody else. I took her shopping, and everyone in the supermarket succumbed to her beauty and charm. I ached to show her to my parents, but they would have asked too many questions. I cut myself off from my friends, letting no one into the flat, and refusing all invitations. I didn't need a job, I didn't need friends, I didn't need anyone or anything but Angel.

I was so happy and proud, the first time she reached out and gripped my finger when I waved it in front of her face. She tried to pull it into her mouth. I resisted, teasing her, freeing my finger and moving it far away, then suddenly offering it again. She laughed at this, as if she knew with utter certainty that in the end I would give up the struggle and let her put it briefly to her gummy mouth. And when that happened, and the taste proved uninteresting, she pushed my hand away with surprising strength, giggling all the while.

According to the development schedule, she was months ahead, being able to do that at her age. "You little smartie!" I said, talking much too close to her face. She grabbed my nose then exploded with glee, kicking the mattress, making a cooing sound I'd never heard before, a beautiful, delicate sequence of tones, each note sliding into the next, almost like a kind of birdsong.

I photographed her weekly, filling album after album. I bought her new clothes before she'd outgrown the old ones, and new toys before she'd even touched the ones I'd bought the week before. "Travel will broaden your mind," I said, each time we prepared for an outing. Once she was out of the pram and into the stroller, seated and able to look at more of the world than the sky, her astonishment and curiosity were sources of endless delight for me. A passing dog would have her bouncing with joy, a pigeon on the footpath was cause for vocal celebration, and cars that were too loud earned angry frowns from Angel that left me helpless with laughter, to see her tiny face so expressive of contempt.

It was only when I sat for too long watching her sleeping, listening too closely to her steady breathing, that a whisper in my head would try to remind me of her predetermined death. I shouted it down, silently screaming back nonsense, obscenities, meaningless

abuse. Or sometimes I would quietly sing or hum a lullaby, and if Angel stirred at the sound I made, I would take that as a sign of victory, as certain proof that the evil voice was lying.

Yet at the very same time, in a sense, I wasn't fooling myself for a minute. I knew she would die when the time came, as one hundred thousand others had died before her. And I knew that the only way to accept that was by doublethink, by expecting her death while pretending it would never really come, and by treating her exactly like a real human child, while knowing all along that she was nothing more than an adorable pet. A monkey, a puppy, a goldfish.

Have you ever done something so wrong that it dragged your whole life down into a choking black swamp in a sunless land of nightmares? Have you ever made a choice so foolish that it cancelled out, in one blow, everything good you might ever have done, made void every memory of happiness, made everything in the world that was beautiful, ugly, turned every last trace of self-respect into the certain knowledge that you should never have been born?

I have.

I bought a cheap copy of the Cutie kit.

I should have bought a cat. Cats aren't permitted in my building, but I should have bought one anyway. I've known people with cats, I like cats, cats have strong personalities, a cat would have been a companion I could have given my attention and affection to, without fuelling my obsession: if I'd tried dressing it up in baby clothes and feeding it from a bottle, it would have scratched me to pieces and then shrivelled my dignity with a withering stare of disdain.

I bought Angel a new set of beads one day, an abacus-like arrangement in ten shiny colours, to be suspended above her in her cot. She laughed and clapped as I installed it, her eyes glistening with mischief and delight.

Mischief and delight?

I remembered reading somewhere that a young baby's "smiles" are really caused by nothing but wind – and I remembered my annoyance; not with the facts themselves, but with the author, for feeling obliged to smugly disseminate such a tedious truth. And I thought, what's this magic thing called "humanity," anyway? Isn't half of it, at least, in the eyes of the beholder?

"Mischief? You? Never!" I leant over and kissed her.

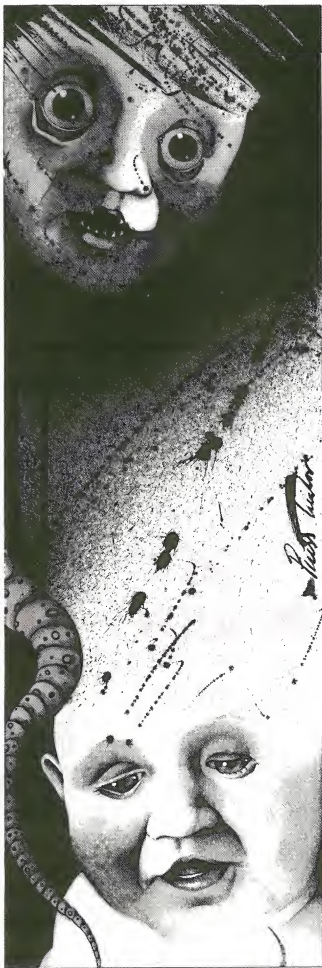
She clapped her hands and said, very clearly, "Daddy!"

All the doctors I've seen are sympathetic, but nothing they can do. The time bomb inside her is too much a part of her. That function, the kit performed perfectly.

She's growing smarter day by day, picking up new words all the time. What should I do?

- (a) Deny her stimuli?
- (b) Subject her to malnutrition?
- (c) Drop her on her head? Or,
- (d) None of the above?

Oh, it's all right, I'm a little unstable, but I'm not yet completely insane: I can still understand the subtle difference between fucking up her genes and actually assaulting her living, breathing body. Yes, if I con-



concentrate as hard as I can, I swear I can see the difference.

In fact, I think I'm coping remarkably well: I never break down in front of Angel. I hide all my anguish until she falls asleep.

Accidents happen. Nobody's perfect. Her death will be quick and painless. Children die around the world all the time. See? There are lots of answers, lots of sounds I can make with my lips while I'm waiting for the urge to pass – the urge to kill us both, right now; the purely selfish urge to end my own suffering. I won't do it. The doctors and all their tests might still be wrong. There might still be a miracle that can save her. I have to keep living, without daring to hope. And if she does die, then I will follow her.

There's one question, though, to which I'll never know the answer. It haunts me endlessly, it horrifies me more than my blackest thoughts of death:

Had she never said a word, would I really have fooled myself into believing that her death would have been less tragic?

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Karen Joy Fowler

Game Night at the Fox & Goose

The reader will discover that my reputation, wherever I have lived, is endorsed as that of a true and pure woman.

— Laura D. Fair

Alison called all over the city trying to find a restaurant that served blowfish, but there wasn't one. She settled for Chinese. She would court an MSG attack. And if none came, then she'd been craving red bean sauce anyway. On the way to the restaurant, Alison chose not to wear her seatbelt.

Alison had been abandoned by her lover who was so quick about it, she hadn't even known she was pregnant yet. She couldn't ever tell him now. She sat pitifully alone, near the kitchen at a table for four. You've really screwed up this time, her fortune cookie told her. Give up. And in small print—Chin's Oriental Palace.

The door from the kitchen swung open, so the air around her was hot for a moment, then cold when the door closed. Alison drank her tea and looked at the tea leaves in the bottom of the cup. They were easy to read. He doesn't love you, they said. She tipped them out onto the napkin and tried to rearrange them. You fool. She covered the message with the one remaining wonton, left the cookie for the kitchen god, and decided to walk all by herself in the dark, three blocks up Hillside Drive, past two alleyways, to have a drink at the Fox and Goose. No one stopped her.

Alison had forgotten it was Monday night. Sometimes there was music in the Fox and Goose. Sometimes you could sit in a corner by yourself listening to someone with an acoustical guitar singing "Killing Me Softly." On Monday nights the television was on and the bar was rather crowded. Mostly men. Alison swung one leg over the only empty bar stool and slid forward. The bar was made of wood, very upscale.

"What can I get the pretty lady?" the bartender asked without taking his eyes off the television screen. He wore glasses, low on his nose.

Alison was not a pretty lady and didn't feel like pretending she was. "I've been used and discarded," she told the bartender. "And I'm pregnant. I'd like a glass of wine."

"You really shouldn't drink if you're pregnant," the man sitting to Alison's left said.

"Two more down and they're already in field goal range again." The bartender set the wine in front of Alison. He was shaking his head. "Pregnant women aren't supposed to drink much," he warned her.

"How?" the man on her left asked.

"How do you think?" said Alison.

"Face-mask," said the bartender.

"Turn it up."

Alison heard the amplified thwack of two football helmets hitting together. "Good coverage," the bartender said.

"No protection," said the man on Alison's right.

Alison turned to look at him. He was dressed in a blue sweater with the sleeves pushed up. He had dark eyes and was drinking a dark beer. "I asked him to wear a condom," she said gently. "I even brought one. He couldn't."

"He couldn't?"

"I really don't want to discuss it." Alison sipped her wine. It had the flat, bitter taste of House White. She realized the bartender hadn't asked her what she wanted. But then, if he had, House White was what she would have requested. "It just doesn't seem fair." She spoke over her glass, unsure that anyone was listening, not really caring if they weren't. "All I did was fall in love. All I did was believe someone who said he loved me. He was the liar. But nothing happens to him."

"Unfair is the way things are," the man on her right told her. Three months ago Alison would have been trying to decide if she were attracted to him. Not that she would necessarily have wanted to do anything about it. It was just a question she'd always asked herself, dealing with men, interested in the answer, interested in those times when the answer changed abruptly, one way or another. But it was no longer an issue. Alison was a dead woman these days. Alison was attracted to no one.

Two men at the end of the bar began to clap suddenly. "He hasn't missed from thirty-six yards yet this season," the bartender said.

Alison watched the kick-off and the run-back. Nothing. No room at all. "Men handle this stuff so much better than women. You don't know what heartbreak is," she said confrontationally. No one responded. She backed off anyway. "Well, that's how it looks." She drank and watched an advertisement for trucks. A man bought his wife the truck she'd always wanted. Alison was afraid she might cry. "What would you do," she asked the man on her right, "if you were me?"

"Drink, I guess. Unless I was pregnant."

"Watch the game," said the man on her left.

"Focus on your work," said the bartender.

"Join the foreign legion." The voice came from behind Alison. She swivelled around to locate it. At a table near a shuttered window a very tall woman sat by herself. Her face was shadowed by an Indiana Jones type hat, but the candle on the table lit up the area below her neck. She was wearing a black tee-shirt with a picture on it that Alison couldn't make out. She spoke again. "Make new friends. See distant places." She gestured for Alison to join her. "Save two galaxies from the destruction of the alien armada."

Alison stood up on the little ledge which ran beneath the bar, reached over the counter and took an olive, sucking the pimento out first, then eating the rest. She picked up her drink, stepped down and walked over to the woman's table. Elvis. That was Elvis's face on the tee-shirt right between the woman's breasts. Are you lonesome tonight? the tee-shirt asked. "That sounds good." She sat down across from the woman. She could see her face better now; her skin was pale and a bit rough. Her hair was long, straight and brown. "I'd rather time travel, though. Back just two months. Maybe three months. Practically walking distance."

"You could get rid of the baby."

"Yes," said Alison. "I could."

The woman's glass sat on the table in front of her. She had finished whatever she had been drinking; the maraschino cherry was all that remained. The woman picked it up and ate it, dropping the stem onto the napkin under her glass. "Maybe he'll come back to you. You trusted him. You must have seen something decent in him."

Alison's throat closed over so that she couldn't talk. She picked up her drink, but she couldn't swallow either. She set it down again, shaking her head. Some of the wine splashed over the lip and onto her hand.

"He's already married," the woman said.

Alison nodded, wiping her hand on her pant leg. "God." She searched in her pockets for a kleenex. The woman handed her the napkin from beneath the empty glass. Alison wiped her nose with it and the cherry stem fell out. She did not dare look up. She kept her eyes focused on the napkin in her hand which she folded into four small squares. "When I was growing up," she said, "I lived on a block with lots of boys. Sometimes I'd come home and my knees were all scraped up because I'd fallen or I'd taken a ball in the face or I'd gotten kicked or punched and I'd be crying and my mother would always say the same thing. 'You play with the big boys and you're going to get hurt,' she'd say. Exasperated." Alison unfolded the napkin, folded it diagonally instead. Her voice shrank. "I've been so stupid."

"The universe is shaped by the struggle between two great forces," the woman told her.

It was not really responsive. It was not particularly supportive. Alison felt just a little bit angry at this woman who now knew so much about her. "Good and evil?" Alison asked, slightly nastily. She wouldn't meet the woman's eyes. "The Elvis and the anti-Elvis?"

"Male and female. Minute by minute, the balance tips one way or the other. Not just here. In every universe. There are places," the woman leaned forward, "where men are not allowed to gather and drink.

Places where football is absolutely illegal.

"England?" Alison suggested and then didn't want to hear the woman's answer. "I like football," she added quickly. "I like games with rules. You can be stupid playing football and it can cost you the game, but there are penalties for fouls, too. I like games with rules."

"You're playing one now, aren't you?" the woman said. "You haven't hurt this man even though you could. Even though he's hurt you. He's not playing by the rules. So why are you?"

"It doesn't have anything to do with rules," Alison said. "It only has to do with me, with the kind of person I think I am. Which is not the kind of person he is." She thought for a moment. "It doesn't mean I wouldn't like to see him get hurt," she added. "Something karmic. Justice."

"We must storm and hold Cape Turk before we talk of social justice." The woman folded her arms under her breasts and leaned back in her chair. "Did Sylvia Townsend Warner say that?"

"Not to me."

Alison heard more clapping at the bar behind her. She looked over her shoulder. The man in the blue sweater slapped his hand on the wood bar. "Good call. Excellent call. They won't get another play in before the half."

"Where I come from she did." Alison turned back to the woman. "And she was talking about women. No one gets justice just by deserving it. No one ever has."

Alison finished off her wine. "No." She wondered if she should go home now. She knew when she got there that the apartment would be unbearably lonely and that the phone wouldn't ring and that she would need immediately to be somewhere else. No activity in the world could be more awful than listening to a phone not ring. But she didn't really want to stay here and have a conversation which was, at worst, too strange and, at best, too late. Women usually supported you more when they talked to you. They didn't usually make you defensive or act as if they had something to teach you, the way this woman did. And anyhow, justice was a little peripheral now, wasn't it? What good would it really do her? What would it change?

She might have gone back and joined the men at the bar during the half. They were talking quietly among themselves. They were ordering fresh drinks and eating beernuts. But she didn't want to risk seeing cheerleaders. She didn't want to risk the ads with the party dog and all his women, even though she'd read in a magazine that the dog was a bitch. Anywhere she went, there she'd be. Just like she was. Heartbroken.

The woman was watching her closely. Alison could feel this though the woman's face remained shadowed and she couldn't quite bring herself to look back at her directly. She looked at Elvis instead and the way his eyes wavered through her lens of candlelight and tears. Lonesome tonight? "You really have it bad, don't you?" the woman said. Her tone was sympathetic. Alison softened again. She decided to tell this perceptive woman everything. How much she'd loved him. How she'd never loved anyone else. How she felt it every time she took a breath and had for weeks now.

"I don't think I'll ever feel better," she said. "No matter what I do."

"I hear it takes a year to recover from a serious loss. Unless you find someone else."

A year. Alison could be a mother by then. How would she find someone else, pregnant like she was or with a small child? Could she spend a year hurting like this? Would she have a choice?

"Have you ever heard of Laura D. Fair?" the woman asked.

Alison shook her head. She picked up her empty wine glass and tipped it to see if any drops remained. None did. She set it back down and picked up the napkin, wiping her eyes. She wasn't crying. She just wasn't exactly not crying.

"Mrs Fair killed her lover," the woman told her. Alison looked at her own fingernails. One of them had a ragged end. She bit it off shorter while she listened. "He was a lawyer. A.P. Crittenden. She shot him on the ferry to Oakland in November of 1870 in front of his whole family because she saw him kiss his wife. He'd promised to leave her and marry Mrs Fair instead and then he didn't, of course. She pleaded a transient insanity known at that time as emotional insanity. She said she was incapable of killing Mr Crittenden who had been the only friend she had in the world." Alison examined her nail. She had only succeeded in making it more ragged. She bit it again, too close to the skin this time. It hurt and she put it back in her mouth. "Mrs Fair said she had no memory of the murder, which many people, not all of them related to the deceased, witnessed. She was the first woman sentenced to hang in California."

Loud clapping and catcalls at the bar. The third quarter had started with a run-back all the way to the fifty-yard line. Alison heard it. She did not turn around, but she took her finger out of her mouth and picked up the napkin. She folded it again. Four small squares. "Rules are rules," Alison said.

"But then she didn't hang. Certain objections were made on behalf of the defence and sustained and a new trial was held. This time she was acquitted. By now she was the most famous and the most hated woman in the country."

Alison unfolded the napkin and tried to smooth out the creases with the side of her palm. "I never heard of her."

"Laura D. Fair was not some little innocent." The woman's hat brim dipped decisively. "Mrs Fair had been married four times and each had been a profitable venture. One of her husbands killed himself. She was not pretty, but she was passionate. She was not smart, but she was clever. And she saw, in her celebrity, a new way to make money. She announced a new career as a public speaker. She travelled the country with her lectures. And what was her message? She told women to murder the men who seduced and betrayed them."

"I never heard of her," said Alison.

"Mrs Fair was a compelling speaker. She'd had some acting and elocution experience. Her performance in court showed training. On the stage she was even better. 'The act will strike a terror to the hearts of sensualists and libertines.'" The woman stabbed dramatically at her own breast with her fist, hitting



Illustrations by Simon Russell

Elvis right in the eye. Behind her hand, Elvis winked at Alison in the candlelight. "Mrs Fair said that women throughout the world would glory in the revenge enacted by American womanhood. Overdue. Long overdue. Thousands of women heard her. Men, too, and not all of them entirely unsympathetic. Fanny Hyde and Kate Stoddard were released in Brooklyn. Stoddard never even stood trial. But then there was a backlash. The martyred Marys were hanged in Philadelphia. And then..." the woman's voice dropped suddenly in volume and gained in intensity. Alison looked up at her quickly. The woman was staring back. Alison looked away. "And then a group of women hunted down and dispatched Charles S. Smith in an alley near his home. Mr Smith was a married man and his victim, Edith Wilson, was pregnant, an invalid, and eleven years old. But this time the women wore sheets and could not be identified. Edith Wilson was perhaps the only female in Otsego County, New York who could not have taken part."

Alison folded her napkin along the diagonal. "So no one could be tried. It was an inspiring and purging operation. It was copied in many little towns across the country. God knows, the women had access to sheets."

Alison laughed, but the woman was not expecting it, had not paused to allow for laughter. "And then Annie Oakley shot Frank Butler in a challenge match in Cincinnati."

"Excuse me," said Alison. "I didn't quite hear you," but she really had and the woman continued anyway without pausing or repeating.

"She said it was an accident, but she was too good a shot. They hanged her for it. And then Grover Cleveland was killed by twelve sheeted women on the White House Lawn. At tea time," the woman said.

"Wait a minute." Alison stopped her. "Grover Cleveland served out two terms. Non-consecutively. I'm sure."

The woman leaned into the candle-light, resting her chin on a bridge she made of her hands. "You're right, of course," she said. "That's what happened here. But in another universe where the feminine force was just a little stronger in 1872, Grover Cleveland died in office. With a scone in his mouth and a child in New York."

"All right," said Alison accommodatingly. Accommodation was one of Alison's strengths. "But what difference does that make to us?"

"I could take you there." The woman pushed her hat back so that Alison could have seen her eyes if she wanted to. "The universe right next door. Practically walking distance."

The candle flame was casting shadows which reached and withdrew and reached at Alison over the table. In the unsteady light, the woman's face flickered like a silent film star's. Then she pulled back in her chair and sank into the darkness beyond the candle. The ball was on the ten-yard line and the bar was quiet. "I knew you were going to say that," Alison said finally. "How did I know you were going to say that? Who would say that?"

"Some lunatic?" the woman suggested.

"Yes."

"Don't you want to hear about it anyway? About my universe?" The woman smiled at her. An unperturbed smile. Nice even teeth. And a kind of confidence that was rare among the women Alison knew. Alison had noticed it immediately without realizing she was noticing. The way the woman sat back in her chair and didn't pick at herself. Didn't play with her hair. Didn't look at her hands. The way she lectured Alison.

"All right," Alison said. She put the napkin down and fit her hands together, forcing herself to sit as still. "But first tell me about Laura Fair. My Laura Fair."

"Up until 1872 the two histories are identical," the woman said. "Mrs Fair married four times and shot her lover and was convicted and the conviction was overturned. She just never lectured. She planned to. She was scheduled to speak at Platt's Hotel in San Francisco on November 21, 1872, but a mob of some two thousand men gathered outside the Hotel and another two thousand surrounded the apartment building she lived in. She asked for police protection, but it was refused and she was too frightened to leave her home. Even staying where she was proved dangerous. A few men tried to force their way inside. She spent a terrifying night and never attempted to lecture again. She died in poverty and obscurity."

"Fanny Hyde and Kate Stoddard were released anyway. I can't find out what happened to the Marys. Edith Wilson was condemned by respectable people everywhere and cast out of her family."

"The eleven-year old child?" Alison asked.

"In your universe," the woman reminded her. "Not in mine. You don't know much of your own history, do you? Name a great American woman."

The men at the bar were in an uproar. Alison turned to look. "Interception," the man in the blue sweater shouted to her exultantly. "Did you see it?"

"Name a great American woman," Alison called back to him.

"Goddamn interception with a goal to go," he said. "Eleanor Roosevelt?"

"Marilyn Monroe," said a man at the end of the bar.

"The senator from California?" the woman asked.

"Now that's a good choice."

Alison laughed again. "Funny," she said, turning back to the woman. "Very good."

"We have football, too," the woman told her. "Invented in 1873. Outlawed in 1950. No one ever got paid to play it."

"And you have Elvis."

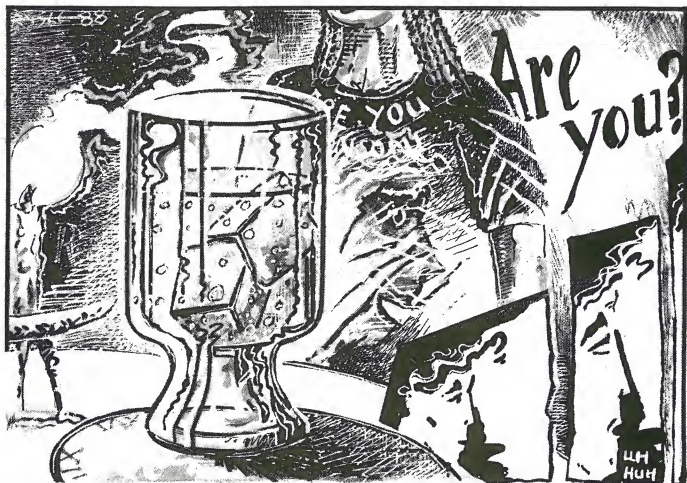
"No, we don't. Not like yours. Of course not. I got this here."

"Interception," the man in the blue sweater said. He was standing beside Alison, shaking his head with the wonder of it. "Let me buy you ladies a drink." Alison opened her mouth and he waved his hand. "Something non-alcoholic for you," he said. "Please. I really want to."

"Ginger-ale, then," she agreed. "No ice."

"Nothing for me," said the woman. They watched the man walk back to the bar and then, when he was far enough away not to hear, she leaned forward towards Alison. "You like men, don't you?"

"Yes," said Alison. "I always have. Are they different where you come from? Have they learned to be



honest and careful with women since you kill them when they're not?" Alison's voice was sharper than she intended, so she softened the effect with a sadder question. "Is it better there?"

"Better for whom?" The woman did not take her eyes off Alison. "Where I come from the men and women hardly speak to each other. First of all, they don't speak the same language. They don't here either, but you don't recognize that as clearly. Where I come from there's men's English and there's women's English."

"Say something in men's English."

"I love you." Shall I translate?"

"No," said Alison. "I know the translation for that one." The heaviness closed over her heart again. Not that it had ever gone away. Nothing made Alison feel better, but many things made her feel worse. The bartender brought her ginger ale. With ice. Alison was angry suddenly, that she couldn't even get a drink with no ice. She looked for the man in the blue sweater, raised the glass at him and rattled it. Of course he was too far away to hear even if he was listening and there was no reason to believe he was.

"Two minute warning," he called back. "I'll be with you in two minutes."

Men were always promising to be with you soon. Men could never be with you now. Alison had only cared about this once and she never would again. "Football has the longest two minutes in the world," she told the woman. "So don't hold your breath. What else is different where you come from?" She sipped at her ginger-ale. She'd been grinding her teeth recently; stress, the dentist said, and so the cold liquid

made her mouth hurt.

"Everything is different. Didn't you ask for no ice? Don't drink that," the woman said. She called to the bartender. "She didn't want ice. You gave her ice."

"Sorry." The bartender brought another bottle and another glass. "Nobody told me no ice."

"Thank you," Alison said. He took the other glass away. Alison thought he was annoyed. The woman didn't seem to notice.

"Imagine your world without a hundred years of adulterers," she said. "The level of technology is considerably depressed. Lots of books never written, because the authors didn't live. Lots of men who didn't get to be president. Lots of passing. Although it's illegal. Men dressing as women. Women dressing as men. And the dress is more sexually differentiated. Codpieces are fashionable again. But you don't have to believe me," the woman said. "Come and see for yourself. I can take you there in a minute. What would it cost you to just come and see? What do you have here that you'd be losing?"

The woman gave her time to think. Alison sat and drank her ginger ale and repeated to herself the things her lover had said the last time she had seen him. She remembered them all, some of them surprisingly careless, some of them surprisingly cruel, all of them surprising. She repeated them again, one by one, like a rosary. The man who had left was not the man she had loved. The man she had loved would never have said such things to her. The man she had loved did not exist. She had made him up. Or he had. "Why would you want me to go?" Alison asked.

"The universe is shaped by the struggle between two great forces. Sometimes a small thing can tip the balance. One more woman. Who knows?" The woman tilted her hat back with her hand. "Save a galaxy. Make new friends. Or stay here where your heart is. Broken."

"Can I come back if I don't like it?"

"Yes. Do you like it here?"

She drank her ginger-ale and then set the glass down, still half-full. She glanced at the man in the blue sweater, then past him to the bartender. She let herself feel just for a moment what it might be like to know that she could finish this drink and then go home to the one person in the world who loved her.

Never in this world. "I'm going out for a minute. Two minutes," she called to the bartender. One minute to get there. One minute to get back. "Don't take my drink."

She stood and the other woman stood, too, even taller than Alison had thought. "I'll follow you. Which way?" Alison asked.

"It's not hard," the woman said. "In fact, I'll follow you. Go to the back. Find the door which says 'Women' and go on through it. I'm just going to pay for my drink and then I'll be right along."

Vixens, was what the door actually said, across the way from the one marked Ganders. Alison paused and then pushed through. She felt more than a little silly, standing in the small bathroom which apparently fronted two universes. One toilet, one sink, one mirror. Two universes. She went into the stall and closed the door. Before she had finished she heard

the outer door open and shut again. "I'll be right out," she said. The toilet paper was small and unusually rough. The toilet wouldn't flush. It embarrassed her. She tried three times before giving up.

The bathroom was larger than it had been, less clean, and a row of urinals lined one wall. The woman stood at the sink, looking into the mirror, which was smaller. "Are you ready?" she asked and removed her breasts from behind Elvis, tossing them into a wire waste basket. She turned. "Ready or not."

"No," said Alison, seeing the face under the hat clearly for the first time. "Please, no." She began to cry again, looking up at his face, looking down at his chest. Are you lonesome tonight?

"You lied to me," she said dully.

"I never lied," he answered. "Think back. You just translated wrong. Because you're that kind of woman. We don't have women like you here now. And anyway, what does it matter whose side you play on? All that matters is that no one wins. Aren't I right? Aren't I?" He tipped his hat to her.

Karen Joy Fowler, winner of the 1987 John W. Campbell Award as the most talented newcomer in the *sf/fantasy* field, has recently completed her first novel. She lives in Davis, California, and her previous contribution to *Interzone* was the Oz-with-an-edge fantasy "Heartland" (issue 24). The above story, which we are the first to publish anywhere, will reappear later this year in an American anthology of original alternative-world stories edited by Gregory Benford.



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THE GATE

SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY



Michael Moorcock

Interview by Colin Greenland

Britain's favourite fantasy writer has a very down-to-earth view of his work. "What I write," he says, "is a kind of myth, really, that tells people, young people, Look, you can do this, you can take control of your lives if you want to, and there's a bit of hope of some sort. I get paid for that. They say, Thanks very much, and they come back for more. I don't find that morally unacceptable."

Michael Moorcock has run his own life since a very early age. He was seventeen when he became the editor of a comic called *Torzon Adventures*; three years later, in 1959, he took a job writing volumes of the *Sexton Blake Library* for Amalgamated Press (which later became Fleetway Publications). After that he went freelance, and there's no way to tell how many pulp novellas, features and comic strips he had a hand in. Authors were never credited in comics, or were "house names": pseudonyms disguising teams of collaborators. Moorcock's speciality was what he later called "the folk-hero business": Billy the Kid, Kit Carson, Robin Hood, Zip Nolan of the Highway Patrol, Dogfight Dixon of the Royal Flying Corps, even Alexander the Great.

In the last twenty-odd years Moorcock has published some sixty-five books. The best-known and most numerous of them are his sword and sorcery fantasies. These make up the vast, rambling cycle of the *Eternal Champion*, who is continually called away through time and space by the mysterious Lords of Law and Chaos, called to fight, in different bodies, all the battles of the cosmos. The *Eternal Champion* is a synthesis of everything Moorcock knows about heroes, a titanic, Romantic Everyman-figure, struggling for a peace he is doomed never to attain. His most popular fictional incarnation is as *Elric*, last Prince of the Bright Empire of Melniboné, armed with his treacherous sword *Stormbringer*, the Stealer of Souls. Much revised and rearranged since the first stories in *Science Fantasy* magazine at the beginning of the sixties, the saga of *Elric* now appears as a rationalized sequence of six books: *Elric of Melniboné* (1972); *The Sailor on the Seas of Fate* (1976); *The Weird*

of the White Wolf; *The Vanishing Tower*; *The Bane of the Black Sword*; and *Stormbringer* (all 1977); plus *Elric of the End of Time* (1984). "You can't count that one," says the author. "It's a piss-take." There's a strong streak of the subversive in Michael Moorcock.

Other books of the *Eternal Champion*, most notably the *Runestaff* series – *The Jewel in the Skull*; *The Mod God's Amulet*; *The Sword of the Down* (all 1968); and *The Runestaff* (1969) – were written at terrific speed: three days each at 15,000 words a day. One draft, no second thoughts, no revisions. This extraordinary labour took a great deal of energy, and relied on everything Moorcock had learned while toiling at the Fleetway fiction-mills. Its purpose was to make money, not just for Moorcock himself, but to support *New Worlds*, the science-fiction magazine he had begun to edit in 1964, and rapidly turned into a forum for imaginative writing of the most experimental and often controversial kinds. Out of *New Worlds* came another myth: Jerry Cornelius, the most modern avatar of the *Eternal Champion*, an ambiguous hero for modern times. The *Jerry Cornelius Quartet* – *The Finol Programme* (1968); *A Cure for Cancer* (1971); *The English Assassin* (1972); and *The Condition of Muzok* (1977) – drew from Moorcock his best and most ambitious writing so far, and won him the *Guardian Fiction Prize* for 1977, together with acclaim from such luminaries as Angus Wilson and Robert Nye.

In 1981 Moorcock published the first volume of a new sequence, "Between the Wars." Called *Byzantium Endures*, it was an entirely different sort of book from anything he had written before: a grand panorama of twentieth-century history, replete with period detail and social and political observations all the more acute for the way in which Moorcock chose to present them, from the decidedly warped viewpoint of Colonel Maxim Arturovich Pyatnitski. These are the memoirs of Pyat (as he is known), recording his exploits as engineer, aviator, utopian inventor, global traveller, great lover, and ultimately secondhand clothes-seller in the Portobello Road. Using only Pyat's

voice, Moorcock swiftly establishes him as a monstrous bigot, cheat and liar. (He is also, incidentally, a long-time associate of Jerry Cornelius's mother.) A second volume of his self-aggrandizing reminiscences was published in 1984 as *The Laughter of Carthage*. With a thousand pages of the series written, Moorcock is still only halfway through. The third volume, *Jerusalem Commands*, is under way; so in 1988 it came as a surprise when Moorcock published another large novel altogether, called *Mother London*.

"It's my magnum opus," he says.

I remind him that when he was writing *Byzantium Endures* he described "Between the Wars" to me as "my War and Peace."

"Did I? Well, this is my other magnum opus. *Magnum Opus 2: The Trouble Continues*. It's set in London between 1940 and the present day, so chronologically it starts where the *Pyat* books will leave off. I'm a bit ahead of myself. I was planning to finish the *Pyat* books before I did it, but I ran out of money, so I had to write this one first. It's 175,000 words, two full years' work, and everyone thinks it's my best book: my wife, my agent, my editor, and me, probably."

Probably?

"I don't know yet. I'm just drained, the way you are when you finish a book like that."

Mother London contains elements of both autobiography and fantasy. "The hub of the novel is the Blitz," explains Moorcock, who has often said that his imaginary landscapes have been powerfully influenced by the bomb-sites of his childhood. "Everything goes into and comes out of that. There are three main characters, and in the Blitz what might be a miracle occurs to each of them. But it's not magical realism, it's a social novel. It's about what people believe, about the stories people tell one another, and how myths and legends serve to hold people together."

"What I was after was a prismatic view of the city." He tries to convey how the whole book works together, making motions with his hands like an infinite series of concentric circles. "It's structured on a duodecimal system."

What does that mean? Twelve chapters? Twelve scenes to a chapter?

"All sorts of things."

Moorcock's notebooks for the Jerry Cornelius books and *Gladiator* (1978), now on deposit at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, show diagrams of their structures as he conceived them: spirals, sine waves, interpenetrating combs. Does he really work out the geometry of a plot before he begins to write?

"Absolutely. That's the secret of it."

Dividing everything by twelve.

"Well, most of my books are constructed by fives, but it's not necessarily fives or twelves, it's having an absolutely accurate structure to build on. Then you can bring in quite a lot of apparently random material — which you should have, I think, in a big work of fiction — but it's there for a reason, and it's controlled. When you're writing in three volumes, each book has a specific function to make up the trilogy, to make it all work finally. Even an ordinary sword and sorcery novel is a three-part structure essentially: Introduction, Development, Conclusion. If you add an Overture, and some form of Coda, you're actually changing the nature of the thing. You have to recognize that. You can't just pick things at random; you have to use them properly."

"There's a certain amount of games-playing going on in this, but it's not like the gamesplaying in modern Latin fiction, which almost requires somebody to know what you're doing before they can read it. This doesn't. It's just a method of structuring for my own purposes. Readers follow it without knowing it's there."

Moorcock has always maintained that he writes for a popular audience, distinguishing his fantastic fiction absolutely from the involuted, quasi-academic novels of authors such as Italo Calvino, Umberto Eco or John Barth. Nor does he recognize much affiliation with the writers of generic fantasy fiction currently proliferating in Britain and, even more so, in America.

"They're just like second-rate Norah Lofts, most of them. They're turned out by actual living people, but according to such strict forms that they don't seem different from one another."

Who makes the forms? The publishers?

"No, it's people mistaking the thrill of recognition for the fire of creativity. Publishers encourage it, but writers go for it too. They do something that they can recognize. That's the success of all Tom Stoppard's plays. People recognize something and they think it's a real revelation. Nobody's to blame for that. There's a market for what they do. It's a folk craft industry, like in China. There are a lot of would-be woodcarvers wanting to show they can carve

the same little doll, but put the eyes on slightly differently."

It's a point Moorcock made in updating *Wizardry and Wild Romance* (1987), his study of the epic fantasy genre. Originally written in 1977, this, Moorcock's only work of criticism, did not appear because the publisher went bankrupt. Typically, the revised version shows Moorcock regards writers such as James Branch Cabell, George Meredith, Mervyn Peake and Fritz Leiber far more highly than J.R.R. Tolkien or C.S. Lewis, whom he sees as apologists for a peculiarly British form of cosy, elitist escapism. "The Lord of the Rings," he says, "is a pernicious confirmation of the values of... a fearful, backward-yearning class." He also exhibits a special hatred of A.A. Milne, Kenneth Grahame, Richard Adams, and all other breeders of "talking vermin."

Clearly, the boom in fantasy fiction which made it worthwhile for a publisher to bring out *Wizardry and Wild Romance* at last has not brought Moorcock much to enjoy. "I'm glad I've been able to write a bit more about some of the writers who hadn't published much when I began the book, which includes M. John Harrison and Gene Wolfe. But the thing I liked best recently was Terry Pratchett's *The Colour of Magic*," Moorcock shrugs. "It made a change. It wasn't hugely distinctive, but it was a great relief."

Jaded as he is with fantasy, Moorcock continues to write it. He's written a new *Elf* book, from an idea which came to him in Morocco, but his last published fantasy, *The Dragon in the Sword* (1987), definitively concludes, he says, the cycle of the Eternal Champion. This is a claim he's made before, in 1975, about *The Quest for Tanelorn*. Tanelorn, the Eternal City, is the promised Paradise where the Champion will finally be able to rest after his ultimate battle, at the end of time. *The Quest for Tanelorn* featured several avatars of the Champion, all of them showing signs of extreme fatigue with the long slog, easily diagnosed as symptoms of their creator's boredom. I remind Moorcock of something he wrote in a press release in 1983: "The publication of *Byzantium Endures* marked his move away from fantasy towards the realistic novel, though he still intends to write the occasional fantastic romance." The question that occurs to me is: why?

"Obvious reasons, I should have thought. Cash. I can get £50,000 for a fantasy without haggling. I'll be lucky if I get £5,000 for an ordinary novel." He reflects. "I think I did get £5,000 apiece for the *Pyat* books. At that rate I can't afford to write them. I've never accumulated any money. It's only in the last few years that I've actually had any."

Inquiries reveal that Moorcock has

actually given away a great deal of what must, over the years, have added up to a considerable income. In the late 60s and early 70s he supported not only New Worlds but also other radical enterprises. An ex-member of staff from the underground newspaper *Freud* recalls more than once going round to Moorcock's with a printer's bill they couldn't pay. Moorcock has also suffered two expensive divorce settlements, looks after his mother's finances, and spent much of 1984 in bed with double pneumonia, unable to earn a penny except by selling outlines for books he hadn't yet written. Commercial fantasy finances the work he cares about. Yet considering that it's the lurid, disreputable sword and sorcery that continually bedevils Moorcock's critical reputation, I wonder whether there isn't more to it than that. Does writing fantasy still give him pleasure?

"No. It's been hard going, writing the few fantasies I've done since *The Warhound and the World's Pain* (1981), except for the most recent one, *The Dragon in the Sword*. Admittedly, I didn't write it in three days, but I did write it in about three weeks. I was surprised by that."

"I was pleased too with *The Dragon in the Sword* because it's got one of my greatest fantasy lines in. It says: 'Just think what one of the binmen would make of a council house like this.' That's the best line in the book. It took an entire scene to set it up. And it's got Hitler in too. As my American editor said, you can't go wrong with the Eternal Champion meets Hitler."

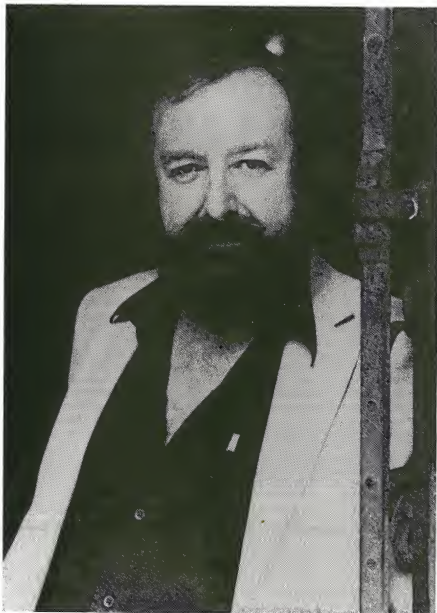
And Tanelorn?

"It's probably mentioned in there somewhere. There's probably someone looking for it. I don't know, I haven't read the book myself. It's one of my old-fashioned, one-draft, Moorcock goodies: straight off the typewriter and into the post. I've never read any of those books through. Other people do that, and pay money for the privilege."

Would it depress him to read one? "No, it would just bore me. Mine are quite as boring to me as anyone else's. I can read some of this stuff, but I can't read the majority of it. I don't see why I should have to read my own."

If I were Michael Moorcock, I should hate the Eternal Champion.

"Why should I? I didn't compromise myself, or any of my moral attitudes, to write *The Dragon in the Sword*. I gave the readers value for money, I think. Most of my fantasy books are above average for the genre. For the same price people tend to get a better book. I don't see anything wrong in having that feeling. It's more to do with craft than art, but I don't confuse the two; I never have. If I'd confused them, I'd have really become an opinionated old bore, instead of only sometimes."



Moorcock's moral attitudes, always clearly and firmly stated, are classically and unfashionably anarchist. He believes in self-determination, and self-responsibility. He believes that people generally know what's best for them, and, despite the popular misconception of anarchism, that self-interest and public interest will usually be identical. In the absence, however, of a serious anarchist movement in contemporary politics, he finds himself more and more committed to feminism.

"If you're interested in what's going on in the world from the 60s onwards, you automatically get interested in feminism; frequently with a poor understanding of it. My novel *The Adventures of Una Persson* and Catherine Cornelius in the Twentieth Century (1976) was an attempt to deal with what I saw as being feminist ideas. I don't think they were very sophisticated ideas; I'm sure most feminists, particularly these days,

wouldn't. But it was an attempt. Since then I've been getting gradually more interested in feminism as a political force for the better, and something worth devoting more of my energy to. Meeting Linda (Steele, Moorcock's wife), who's a convinced feminist and a good one, not just a talker, helped me sophisticate it. I happen to believe that if part of one has a will towards justice and true egalitarianism, then that is probably the best place to work."

Essays on anarchist and feminist themes appear in the chapbook *The Retreat from Liberty* (1983) and in Moorcock's collection of short stories, *The Opium General* (1984), which he dedicated "To all women at war." "I've come to realize that my readership in public libraries is actually higher than the circulation of most well-known weekly magazines. So instead of thinking of myself as a pamphleteer and getting to a mass audience through the New Statesman, I can actually reach more people with my hardback books.

That's why I've started introducing political essays into my collections, and why there's been a lot more politics cropping up in the introductions I write than there used to be: because I realize I've got the audience there. I'm sure most of them are unconverted, so I may as well preach to them!

"You can't let politics interfere with fiction, but obviously you have certain ideas that you keep trying to push. I can't do a straight feminist novel; what I do is more in the way of parody, comedy, satire — taking the piss out of conventional stereotypes. That's what I started to do in *The City in the Autumn Stars* (1986). I began with a young man, a fugitive disguised as a lady's maid, escaping in the carriage with the lady who's rescued him. It's a standard picaresque device, straight out of Smollett. But what I did was to keep him in skirts thereafter, and have him alter according to how people treated him, and so on. It's the eighteenth century: I was already dealing with the Enlightenment and the French Revolution...and then there's Mary Wollstonecraft, doing the Declaration of the Rights of Women; and the central character is a woman who's a would-be alchemist...and then there's a balloon in it. It's very good, actually." He sits back, rubbing his forehead. "There's a lot of good stuff in that one."

Yet *The City in the Autumn Stars* is the only book Moorcock has ever had rejected.

"The editor sent it back, saying, 'This may be a work of genius, but it's not what I commissioned.' It was too long, and I'd got totally obsessed with the eighteenth-century language, and with the picaresque form, to the point where it was no longer recognizable as a genre fantasy. It was all over the place — like a tyro novel, very lumpy. My agent said it had some of the best writing and some of the worst writing of mine he'd ever seen!

"What had happened was, I did exactly what I've always refused to do. I'd starting mixing genres. One of the reasons I could write those sword and sorcery things so fast was that I had a very clear idea of what the rules were for writing them. When I came to write *The City in the Autumn Stars* I'd forgotten all the rules. So I then shortened it, and got rid of the whole sexual theme. It just didn't fit. The less fantastic elements were trimmed back. But it's still got the balloon in."

Messing up the genres was one thing Moorcock was loudly accused of when he was editing *New Worlds* in the 60s. His editorials and the review pages frequently attacked the stalwarts of science fiction's "old guard," Isaac Asimov, Robert Heinlein and Arthur C. Clarke. What he published instead was fresh, inventive, often bizarre, and equally often unrecognizable as sf. It

cost Moorcock considerably, in terms of both money and personal energy, to keep producing a magazine campaigning for a new imaginative fiction, while writing commercial books to finance it. Eventually the magazine's distributors grew nervous about its outspokenness, and quashed it. Looking back twenty years, Moorcock has no regrets.

"I think it was worth it because of the morale-raising aspects of the thing. It didn't really matter how many people were doing tremendous work, or weren't. It was the fact that people were trying. There are writers who reckoned that they responded to the magazine being there and wrote better for it. I think it raised the level of aspiration, if not necessarily the level of accomplishment. We published Gene Wolfe's first story; we published the best stuff Thomas Disch has done, and J.G. Ballard, Brian Aldiss, and a lot of new writers. Publishing a magazine, you can't have a direct effect on the quality of fiction. The only people who can do that are the actual individuals producing it. But you can applaud it when they do produce it.

"And I think there have been long-term effects. I don't think I can see them easily, because I'm in the position of the disappointed idealist who expected a global revolution, as it were. But things have broken up now to the extent where sf's almost done its

work. You've now got a whole range of different kinds of fiction, a lot of it imaginative fiction; in fact the imaginative novel is now pretty much the norm, sometimes unfortunately so. The only thing we've got to set against it is something like Anita Brookner's *Hotel du Lac*. The reason writers took up sf, just as they took up the classic Philip Marlowe-style detective novel, and the country house murder mystery, and the Victorian Gothic novel, and indeed the picaresque, was that they were desperate to find some vitality in the form itself, which is nonsense. Any form is only as good as the person using it. I'm not saying sf is moribund. I've got nothing against it. The kind of people who write sf are frequently extremely literal-minded people, so they don't understand about form. Again, they're dealing with recognition, not with creativity. But presumably sf will go on interesting people, and while it does there will be writers who make the best use of it."

I quote him something he said in 1978: "In one sense I write for the idealistic 18-year-old that I once was. He is my idea of my 'market'. If I betray him, I betray myself and every reader I possess."

"That's still true," he says, "of the fantasy novels, at least. The other novels are written more for the 28-year-old that I once was." He sighs. "I don't know; it's all bullshit really.

There's something that makes you stick to what you set out to do when you were eighteen; or there isn't. What I do is knock about as much as possible. Stay away from literary society, with all its abstractions. I like to think that I've maintained my position, my moral course, and continue to write moral fiction that's robust. But I don't know whether I have or not. You never know when you've lost touch. It could have been yesterday."

Michael Moorcock's new "Elric" novel which is referred to in the above interview is entitled *The Fortress of the Pearl*, and it is forthcoming from Gollancz in June 1989, priced £11.95.

Also due from the same publisher later this year is *Casablanca*, a new collection of Moorcock's fiction and non-fiction. His third novel in the "Between the Wars" sequence, *Jerusalem Commands*, is still in progress.

Correction – *Interzone* 28

We very much regret a rare printers' error which spoiled part of the sense of the interview with Ramsey Campbell in the last issue of *Interzone*. Our apologies to Mr Campbell, to the interviewer (Phillip Vine), and to our readers. What happened was that a small section of the paste-up of page 13 stuck to the printers' platemaking camera and was accidentally reproduced in the equivalent position on pages 11 and 15, concealing portions of text which should have been visible on those pages.

Every effort will be made to ensure that this kind of mistake does not recur. To compensate for the error, we reproduce here the two pieces of text which were inadvertently obliterated:

Page 11: bottom of centre column:

Susan Hill fallacy. Now I do like *The Woman in Black*. It seems to be again a very fine, well sustained, elegant, intelligent novel and if I'd come across it in a collection of Victorian ghost novels, I would have been not merely amazed by how well it fitted in but also, if I didn't know it was by a contemporary of mine, I would have assumed it was by somebody writing in that period. However, it does seem to me that that's a definition of its limits as well as praise for its achievement. It particularly seems to me that when Susan Hill says, as she has said, that the ghost story must be set in the past or somewhere like the past, that's less a creative principle than an admission of defeat.

Page 15, bottom of centre column immediately beneath photograph:

ally, is that it was never a matter, or very rarely a matter in Lovecraft's case, of talking about unspeakable horrors. The technique is rather to show enough to suggest much more. James is especially good at that. The other thing about James that I still value is the sense of an extremely ordered existence being violated by something that comes in from the most unlikely direction – you know, the mouth under the pillow, the bag that puts its arms round

Phillip Mann

An Old-Fashioned Story

Not having the tool kit to hand and being of an impatient nature, Jody improvised by using the blunt end of a nail file to prize up the large toenail on Elizabeth's left foot. Revealed was the small copper screw which controlled the energy circuit. Two turns with the nail file and the screw lifted. Immediately Elizabeth's brown tanned body lost its appearance of robust health.

She slumped. Breasts became pouches. Skin became rubbery. The eyes lost their sparkle and turned upwards, becoming like boiled egg-whites. With an audible hiss the abdomen became concave and the firm thigh muscles turned to lard.

Jody looked at his handiwork with some alarm. He had never gone so far as to deactivate Elizabeth's energy circuit. The transformation from nubile young woman to this flaccid thing of foam and plastic was almost too much for him. For a moment he thought seriously of calling in a specialist, but then he rallied. "No," he reasoned, "the manual says that repairs and modifications can be made by the careful amateur, and that's me." He looked at the body lying on the kitchen table and noticed that since the stomach had sunk, a fine hairline seam had become evident running from under the jaw right down to the crotch. He also noticed a foetid smell: a difficult smell to define, something of babies and something of machine oil. There was also a slight seepage coming from nose and vagina, and Jody wondered if he should have read more carefully the section in the manual entitled, "Pre-closedown procedures." He crossed to the sink and collected a full roll of kitchen tissues which he began to tuck round the body.

And at that moment the doorbell rang. This was followed quickly by the opening of the front door and a voice calling, "Yoo hoo. It's only me." Jody recognized the voice of Hildergarde, the girl who lived next door and who had been his friend and playmate since childhood.

"I'm back here," called Jody. "In the kitchen. I'm trying to mend Elizabeth." He heard the crisp tap tap of Hildergarde's shoes and guessed that she had come to show him the new outfit she had bought during her visit to the city.

He was right. Hildergarde arrived and paused in the doorway, one hand up under her hair at the back of her head creating a French effect and the other hand on her hips. The dress was Empire style with high bodice and ankle length hem. It was made of yellow and green silk with blue lace round the neck and arms. On her feet were high-heeled boots with

gold trim. "Est ce que tu aimes my dress?" asked Hildergarde with an affected accent.

"Yes, very nice," said Jody. "Now come and help me with this. You can hold the manual while I do the manipulating."

Hildergarde pulled a face at his obvious lack of interest and dropped her pose and entered the kitchen. "What's wrong with her?" she asked.

"I don't know," said Jody patiently. "That's what I'm trying to find out."

"Well, did she suddenly stop moving and start to smoulder or something? My Joseph did that once. We'd forgotten to keep him topped up. He just stood there and started to fume. Then Dad came in and carried him out to the garage and filled his sack and whatnots with oil and that syntho-extract you can get at the chemists, and he was right as rain."

"Hmm," said Jody, his forehead wrinkling. "I wish it were that simple, but I check her every week and there's never been a problem. Besides, she's got a daily vomit and douche cycle installed and if there were a fluid balance problem I'd know about it soon enough. Hell, the bed'd become a river. She's very clean."

"What happened then?"

"It was this morning, about half past ten. I was feeling a bit... you know. And no one was home. So then suddenly Elizabeth stops and lifts up her head and then she butted me right here." Jody pointed to his forehead. There was a bump, covered by his blond fringe. Hildergarde reached out and touched the bump gently with the tips of her fingers. "That's going to be sore," she said. "The skin's all cracked."

"It is sore," said Jody. "Well, I switched her off for a while, for about an hour... thought I'd let her cool down. And when I switched her back on she was just like normal. But then later on we were out by the pool talking and she suddenly threw her glass into the pool and then tried to throw me in. I hit the safety switch and closed her down. And then I thought I'd try and mend her myself."

"What do you think's wrong with her?"

"Just roguing a bit, I think. I've decided to strip her down, give her a tune-up and change her personality card. That ought to do the trick. And if it doesn't -"

"Harry knows a lot about Synthos," said Hildergarde. "Why not call him in? Remember he made those Siamese twins one time and that -" Harry was the boy who lived two doors down the road. He could do everything well and he and Jody had been natural enemies from the day they learned to race their trikes.

"If I want Harry's help," said Jody, "I'll ask for it."

For the moment I want to do this myself. More interesting that way. All right?" Hildergarde nodded. "So, you hold the manual where I can see it and I'll open her up."

Hildergarde took the manual and stood at the end of the table near the supine Elizabeth's head. She held the pages open away from her.

Jody bent to his work. "Now let's see. It says here, 'Release the top seal by gentle pressure on the larynx and then insert finger and slide downwards to open pectoral, stomach and bowel areas.' Right. Here goes." He pressed gently on Elizabeth's larynx and the mouth opened and then the entire throat flap. He slipped his finger inside the flap and slid it downwards and the skin opened easily. It slit laterally too at the diaphragm and flopped back. The inside of the skin was dark like fish skin and oily. Revealed within were a complicated array of plastic wheels and bands as well as micro-circuitry and inflatable pockets. The skeletal structure was of shiny stainless steel with ball joints and leaf-spring joints and feather-sensor couplings.

"Fan-tastic," said Jody. "Hell, it makes you wonder what we're like inside, doesn't it?"

Hildergarde attention was on the pelvis. Here there was a modular arrangement of compressors, flexible bands and micro switches and all were mounted on a stainless steel girdle. "What's that?" she asked, pointing to a small pocket of stretched fabric. Jody consulted the chart in the manual.

"That's the vaginal sack."

"My Joseph's got one of those too. I saw it when Dad was servicing him one day. Hey, what model is this?"

Jody consulted the front pages of the manual. "Model number and inspection warranty will be found on the skull close to the right ear under the wig flap."

Hildergarde took hold of Elizabeth's hair, which was now lifeless and lank like seaweed, and peeled it back from the skull. It came away easily like a teapot cosy to reveal neatly stencilled details. "Model: Ovida Mark 2.4. Fem. Spec. 37. Card 4. Elizabeth the Entertainer. Available in coral, tan and ebony. Swim protected. Throw and jump fortified. Parts compatible with Ovida 1.5 - 2.4. (All sexes.) Note: this model has both vacuum and pneumatic functions. Inspected by Taurus and Virgo Electronics Inc. Brooklyn. Wgtn."

"My Joseph's an Ovida 2.4 too. Hey let me look."

Hildergarde came round the table and studied Elizabeth's pelvic arrangements in detail. She pointed to a series of bright bevelled studs mounted on a flexible plastic plate and connected to a small hydraulic piston. "You see those," she said. "That's where the penis attachment fits. Isn't that clever?"

Jody looked at Hildergarde. "Penis attachment?" he said. "You mean they just clip on? I mean, I never thought..."

Hildergarde looked at him scornfully. "Well, it's a bit more complicated than that but still pretty simple all the same. I've got two of them actually." Then suddenly she blushed. "They're quite different... well, the same but different. Similar. What about Elizabeth?"

"Never thought much about it," said Jody. "I just

accepted the way she is."

"Really?" said Hildergarde, and Jody could not tell whether she believed him or not.

"Yes, really. I didn't even know the models were unisex. I mean my Elizabeth doesn't look anything like your Joseph."

"True. They're not even like brother and sister."

"There must be something on their card that alters the physiognomy as well."

"Must be. Come on let's find the card cache," said Hildergarde with enthusiasm. "This is fun."

Jody grunted and consulted the manual which he now had to prop up on the side of the table since Hildergarde wanted to be actively involved in the investigation. "Now let's see. 'Personality Card. Destruction of... Duplication... Mail-ordering... Here we are. Replacement... page 15.'" He thumbed through the pages. "The personality card cache is located above the stomach pouch and to the right of the sternum auxiliary power pack. Note that all directions are from the Syntho's POV. The rib-hinge release screw is beneath the left clavicle. Care must be taken to release the six shock-adjusters and isolate the cache from the power pack before removing it from the twin flanges of Synaptic Bridge 3. See Illus. 88."

"Sounds simple," said Hildergarde. "Remember how we used to play doctors and nurses? Well this is a lot better."

The sternum and ribs were a single flexible unit. Jody found the rib-hinge release screw and turned it once. Immediately a servo-extension arm about the size of a pencil straightened and pushed, whereupon the entire rib case and sternum pivoted upwards. The cache could now be clearly seen. It was about the size of a matchbox and made of a black plastic. It was tucked between two iridescent plastic extensions which resembled the spread wings of a butterfly. Together these wings constituted Synaptic Bridge 3. Bedded within them were thousands of micro paths which joined the cache to the furthest extensions of the body. "Wow," breathed Hildergarde. "That's beautiful. You'd better be careful."

At this point Jody decided that it would be a good idea to get the special Ovida Syntho tool kit from his bedroom. "Don't you touch anything while I'm gone," he said to Hildergarde. For her part she put her tongue out at him and said, "Will you bring me a lemonade when you come back?"

When he returned with his tool box and the lemonade, he found Hildergarde with her arm deep in Elizabeth and her hair tangled in some of the white plastic cogwheels. He set his tool box down beside Elizabeth's head and placed the glass on top of it. Then he released Hildergarde by snipping off some of her hair. Finally he rotated some of the cogs with his thumb and managed to pull most of the hair free. But in turning the cogs a few strands of the hair managed to snake down deeper into the pulleys and drums of the spine. "I told you not to touch," he said. "Now look what's happened."

"Sorry. But I discovered how they do the breasts," she replied. "It's very ingenious. I got excited and that was when my hair tumbled loose. Do you want to see?"

"What?"

"How they do the breasts."

"Oh. All right."

Hildegard reached inside Elizabeth again, feeling down the right side of her body to the place where the hips swelled. "It's down here. There's a funny pump thing. Watch." She pumped her hand vigorously for a few moments and Elizabeth's right breast began to swell and the nipple stood up. "There's another pump on the other side for the other breast. Now I'll release it." There was a soft bubbling sound and the breast and nipple subsided. "Look. Can you see? There's a tuck in it so that part of the breast can fold inside. That's what you do if you want a male like my Joseph. You close the seal like this and voila, no breast."

"What about the nipple? You don't see men with nipples like that."

"It unclips. When it's deflated like now there's no pressure to hold the nipple on and it just unclips. There. See." She took the nipple between finger and thumb and squeezed and twisted. The nipple came free. "Easy."

"Let me look at that," said Jody and he reached across and as he did so he bumped the glass of lemonade which tipped and fell emptying part of its contents onto his tool box and part into the open cadaver of Elizabeth. "Now look what you've made me do," he said. "I wish I'd never opened her up."

Hildegard placed the nipple in his hand. "Here, you look at this while I mop up the mess. Where's your squeegee?"

Five minutes later the mess was cleared and Jody could return to working on the card cache.

Carefully he removed the shock adjusters and set them neatly in a tea cup brought from the cupboard. Then he started to disconnect the leads of the auxiliary power pack. They were stiff and he had to use more force than he wanted. Two leads came away cleanly but the third would not budge. In attempting to limber it free Jody accidentally closed a circuit in the power pack and for a few seconds power was fed to the spread body. Wheels turned, the legs lifted, the mouth bit, juices were pumped, the fingers beat on the table like castanets and the spine arched. Then a safety breaker cut in and the body slumped once more. But the damage was done. One of the spinal cords had sprung loose under pressure and flipped right out of the body and rolled across the floor. A thick white rubber pulley-band had jumped its tracks in the pelvic girdle and disappeared down the right leg. Two small switches had smouldered briefly and burnt the soft foam rubber which made the hips swell. A spray of warm lubricant had spirted from the lower abdomen and left a spotty trail across Hildegard's hand, arm and dress. She screamed and jumped back and then ran out of the kitchen and away. The front door slammed behind her. There may have been other damage done to Elizabeth but Jody could not tell.

But at least the third lead from the auxiliary power pack was disengaged and all Jody now had to do was to separate the card cache from Synaptic Bridge 3. This was accomplished without any trouble.

Jody unscrewed the top from the card cache and looked inside. He saw a square of white plastic lodged between two plates of black plastic. The white plastic

showed a tab above the plates and was obviously the personality card. Using his long nosed pliers Jody gripped the plastic card and extracted it slowly. It came free with a click. Written on the card was the simple message "Ovida Fem. spec. Card 4." He set this to one side.

Located in the special tool box was a small file box which contained three alternative personality cards. These were supplied gratis with all Ovida Synthos by way of advertising. For the dedicated collector, thousands of other specialized types were available ranging from robust 19th century working girls complete with wooden clogs to houri dancers of old Persia. These were also available in many personality shades from sunny and gentle to downright sadomasochistic. But such were very expensive and the cards were frequently custom-made to suit the particular requirements of the purchaser.

All Jody had at his disposal were four standard occupational types, all of which were basically useful and kind. Elizabeth the Entertainer had been his most complex card.

Jody studied the other cards.

Card 1. Norma the Nurse. Brisk and competent but with a tender manner. This card can be augmented to allow Norma to care for babies or the terminally ill. Note: Norma is not a doctor. For full medical functions consult Proctor the Doctor and Phyllis the Physician. Ovida International take no responsibility...etc.

Card 2. Myra the Muse. Myra is an advanced word processor and the ideal help-mate for the aspirant writer. She is introverted in manner but with a strong underlying sensuality. Apart from a compendious knowledge of literature, Myra also possesses optional verse functions and a rhyme memory of over 100,000 words.

Card 3. Carol the Cleaner/Cook. Thoughtful and confidential. The perfect companion for the lonely housewife who dreads the hours of boredom between breakfast and dinner. Carol has news and scandal circuits as well as an ability to cook over 200 meals. Note: Carol can be augmented with an anti-alcohol programme.

This was what was available and Jody didn't feel drawn to any of them. He was already missing the fun which Elizabeth the Entertainer had brought into his life. He read through the cards once again and finally selected Myra the Muse. Holding the card with his tweezers he slipped it into place in the cache.

The return journey of repair went without a hitch. First the auxiliary power leads made their connections smoothly. The shock adjusters fitted into place and the whole unit snuggled securely between the twin wings of the synaptic centre.

As Jody was lowering the rib cage and locking it into place, Hildegard returned. She had changed into a pair of bulky white overalls which had masses of pockets. With her was her male Syntho companion called Joseph. He was a serious-faced young man with red hair and freckles. His character was, as Hildegard had often told Jody, sensible and studious with strong compassion circuits. He also had broad shoulders, narrow hips and the legs of a tennis player. Plus extras.

"How are you getting on?" asked Hildegard.

"Oh, OK. Nearly finished."

"Hear you had some problems," said Joseph.

"Uh uh," replied Jody without looking up, concentrating on his work. He had found the spinal cog that had jumped loose and by pushing and easing managed to limber it back into place. He next reached down inside the right leg and tried to find the band that had come loose. No luck.

"Ah well," he said, "this model has self-repair circuits."

"Sure do," said Joseph amiably and he cracked his knuckles.

"What card did you use for her?" asked Hildergarde. "I brought some of mine over in case you wanted to experiment." She pronounced the word with all kinds of innuendo and grinned wickedly. "I brought Bruce the Builder and Randolph the Wrestler just in case. Thought they might be fun."

"Oh thanks," said Jody, "but I've already put Myra's card in."

"Myra the Muse! Bor-ing," said Hildergarde pulling a face. "I've seen Dad use her."

"No. Myra the Muse is a nice lady," said Joseph.

Both Hildergarde and Jody stared at him. It was rare for a Syntho to offer an unsolicited opinion let alone a dissenting one.

"Well I need to study a bit," said Jody, weakly, and he returned to his work, folding over the flaps of skin.

The body came together neatly. As the seams met they exuded an oil. This was a kind of protective insulation, for once the skin became charged the flaps would instantly bond. Jody replaced the energy fuse in the big toe of the left foot and screwed it into place and closed the toenail with a click. Immediately, and much to Jody's relief, the body began to firm and the seams disappeared. The breasts slowly shaped. Jody noticed that Myra's breasts were slightly smaller than Elizabeth's. He also noticed that he had neglected to replace the nipple. The jaw trembled. Fluid ran briefly from the nose and then Myra sniffed. The muscles in her arms and thighs came up to tone and flexed. It seemed to Jody that Myra's hips were wider than Elizabeth's and that her legs were slightly shorter and thicker. Not unattractive, he noted.

Fully formed, brown-skinned and vibrant, the body held its position in suspended animation. Jody reached up under the nape of the neck and found a micro switch and double clicked with his finger.

Immediately the body drew in breath. Myra's eyes turned in their orbits and then settled and focused. The mouth opened and closed a few times. There was a choking sound from the throat and then a pleasant contralto voice said, "Myra sick. Please come quick."

She sat up. Her head travelled through one hundred and eighty degrees, surveying the kitchen and those who were looking at her. She did not blink. "My name is Myra. I live in a pen. Cry sorrow. Sorrow. My hair is gone."

Jody picked up the wig and handed it to her. She took it carefully and set it on her head and adjusted it. A greater assurance came into her figure. She edged forwards on the table until her toes could touch the floor and then, using her hands, she eased herself upright and stood. "I am Myra. I need clothes. Please dress me." Her eyes settled on Jody. "Please dress me Jody. We have so much work to do. 'Ars longa, vita

brevis.' 'The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne.' Chaucer after Seneca after Hippocrates. Please give me your hand, Jody. Myra the Muse is sick." Myra reached out her hand.

Jody reached out to meet her. But before they could join, before Myra could take one step, her right leg gave way and she crashed down onto her knees. "Poor Myra's a cold." Then she writhed onto her back and began to scratch at her eyes.

Jody and Hildergarde started forwards but both were too slow. They felt themselves gripped from behind by strong fingers and hauled back. Joseph stepped swiftly between them. He came close to Myra and knelt down. He slipped his arms under her quivering body and lifted her up, and then turned and faced Jody. "You should have consulted a specialist," he said. "You're just a boy."

Then he turned and, carrying the still shaking Myra in his arms, exited from the kitchen. As he departed they heard the contralto of Myra murmuring, "Howl. Howl. Howl."

Jody rubbed his arm where the Syntho Joseph had gripped him. He could feel the bruise rising. Hildergarde scrambled to her feet and ran to the door. "You come back here, Joseph," she called. "You come back here this moment. Do you hear?"

For answer the door slammed.

Hildergarde turned to Jody in disbelief. "Well, what do you think of that?" she said indignantly.

Jody shrugged. "If I were you I'd get some of his circuits trashed," he said. "He could become dangerous. He's starting to rogue." Jody nodded towards the phone. "You can give the wardens a call now if you like. They'll soon round him up. They'll know what to do."

"And what about Myra the Muse?"

"No worries," said Jody, smiling suddenly. "She was still under guarantee. I'll get a new one."

Phillip Mann, born in Yorkshire in 1942, published his first short story, "Lux in Tenebris," in *Interzone* 24. He had already been publishing novels since 1982, however. The latest of them, *Pioneers* (1988), has received a considerable amount of praise. He works as a theatre director in Wellington, New Zealand, and is currently completing a new novel which he describes as being about "the tragic fate of the captain of a magnificent, state-of-the-art hospital spaceship."

Mutant Popcorn

Film reviews by Nick Lowe

Is there a British sf cinema? The question doesn't seem to have occurred, amongst all our other agonies of tribal identity. But most of us would accept an idea of "British sf" as something more than just a demographic label, and we seem to have swallowed a notion of "British film" in stark defiance of the de facto cosmopolitanism of a collaborative art-form in an international market. Does it seem intrinsically absurd to think about the space where the circles cross? After all, there are strong local traditions of genre cinema in neighbour fields of fantasy and (especially) horror. You couldn't cut the cred in my clique at school without intoning the solemn names of God: "Max-J.-Rosenberg-and-Milton-Subotsky..." Lack of studio continuity's fragmented the picture in latter years, but the Hammer-Amicus epoch gave splendid solidity to the idea of a peculiarly British form of horror – whose identifying signals were impossibly deadpan scripts, very good actors playing very badly and very bad starlets playing brilliantly, wonderful lighting camera coupled with wildly erratic direction, and a resolute determination not to frighten anyone very much. Even in more recent years, we'd probably acknowledge a mild family resemblance between a few sporadic indie crossovers in the auteur fantasy arena: *Excalibur*, *Time Bandits*, anything based on Angela Carter. But do these amount to an island tradition of fantasy film, of the kind there undeniably was in the innocent sixties?

Of course, in the leaner eighties, the wide picture is more complex. Native writers, actors, directors shuttle in and out of Hollywood; west coast movies work London studios, technicians, and extras for US dollars with only the core cast and shoot team imported, or (as especially at Columbia under Putnam) bankroll vast intercontinental follies like *Münchhausen* and *The Last Emperor* without an American accent in shot. Nevertheless, I'd argue there is a recognizably British eighties sf/f movie, and that the principal reason we don't acknowledge it is not that the money is foreign (we still claim *A Fish Called Wanda* for the nation, to our shame) but that the films aren't generally very good.

Details flicker, but let me describe

a typical profile. The genre is fantasy-adventure, loosely medieval in texture. Our hero is a minor American star name, the heroine an emerging British starlet; supporting cast are veteran home-grown character actors working

the phonelines, the deity in his irrepressibly good humour has given us *Slipstream*.

Slipstream, of course, is the first arrival from the new production



From *Slipstream* (copyright EFP, 1989)

heroic things with impossible dialogue. The title is a single word, chosen for vague ambience rather than informative content: *Krull*, *Legend*, *Ladyhawke*, *Labyrinth*, *Willow*. Sometimes the director is American, as the effects team often is and the script nearly always; the villain, however, must be a Brit, ideally a distinguished stage actor down on his pennies. All the locations are green and damp-looking.

It's easy to object that these movies – and *Clash of the Titans*, *Dark Crystal*, *The Princess Bride* – are essentially Hollywood product, using UK facilities as a matter of simple economic convenience; that in the end it's not the writer, director, or performers that determine the nationality of a film, but whose picture on the banknotes. Despite that, I can't help feeling it's precisely the Britishness which makes all these movies so fundamentally naff in a way that even not very good all-local product (*Company of Wolves*, say, or *Dream Demon*) isn't quite. And if we really needed proof that the product's the same whether it's Soho or Beverly Hills on the ultimate end of

arm of rising UK distribution company Entertainment, notable for some years for their inspired pickups of independent features from the likes of Empire Pictures, and lately dipping an increasingly confident toe in the waters of mainstream distribution. Everyone wants a new British production company to succeed, especially one with a proven sense of enterprise and wit, and a high-budget sf adventure with credits chocka with famous names and faces looks a worthy kickoff to a long and glittery future.

Well, by the time you see this the film will have opened, and even the obits will be stone stiff cold. Perhaps the making-of story will one day be told, because I'm sure it has all the inexorable convergence and doomed inevitability of a superior Greek tragedy. At the very least, this movie deserves to pass into some niche of legend unjustly occupied at present by the likes of *Heaven's Gate* and *The Adventures of Baron Münchhausen*, because this one is finally it: an acephalous thing that could never have lived and breathed, let alone

made expert love to the eyes and ears of a nation while deftly easing the wallet from their inside pocket.

The ironic thing is, *Slipstream* is on its surface a lot like the great tradition of British sf. For one thing, it's about the weather. The title refers to a world-circling wind current born of late twentieth-century environmental phase-change, which has swept the planet virtually clean of life and is ridden now by the scattered survivors in microlights: a grim symbiosis with the force that has wiped out their species. (Isn't that great? Doesn't the whole concept give you a primeval buzz in the alveoli? How could they go wrong?) Treasured relics of the world that was preserved by a subterranean commune of curators and in the circuits of the last remaining androids, one of whom (Bob Peck) is adrift in the *Slipstream*, searching for a mythical

here); and the writer seems to have penned a lot of films nobody's ever heard of. Certainly the script must carry much of the guilt, because even an astonishing supporting cast (cameos from Robbie Coltrane, Rita Wolf, Ben Kingsley, F. Murray Abraham, Roshan Seth, Heathcote Williams...) can make nothing of the dialogue and relationships they're expected to carry. But there was some strange acting also in *Tron* — Jeff Bridges' strained delivery had much in common with Paxton's here — and some of the problems are very deep. For instance, the locations intercut Cappadocia with the Yorkshire Dales, which would probably be okay for transatlantic customers to whom they're not familiar, except that of course they don't look anything like each other. Again, considering the premise of the scenario, there seems surprisingly little wind around most of

Stoker's much-admired, little-read novel of Edwardian stirrings in the naughty reaches of the limbic system cried out to be filmed in the eighties; whether it cried out to be filmed by Ken Russell is a matter for discriminating judgment, but at least this is Russell's best in years. (I'd actually have little hesitation in saying it's his best ever, but others find more than I can in his sixties product.) And most of what I liked a lot about it, once you get past the obligatory trip-o-color video effects and mass impalings of nuns, is that at heart it's an old-fashioned all-British horror cheapie in the tradition of golden-age Hammers.

And oh, how they ham... Amanda Donohue is the immortal and scantly-clad priestess of a prehistoric serpent god lurking deep beneath the moors, and appeased by the periodic sacrifice of a virgin to the greedy snake. (Oh yes, it's all on this level.) This year's model is scrumptious Catherine Oxenburg, left to fend along with kid sister Sammi Davis by running a guest house for visiting Scottish archaeologists like Peter Capaldi. (Why does he have to be Scottish? It would be too kind to say further...) Only a year ago their parents tragically-and-mysteriously disappeared and the bodies have never been found; and now the ancient skull of a gigantic serpent turns up amid Roman remains excavated under their lawn, the site of an ancient convent fallen to ruin. The dashing new Lord of the local manor (Hugh Grant) recalls the family legend of his ancestor the first Lord D'Ampton (geddit), and how he slew a great Worm at the very cavern where traces of the missing couple have been found! But will our heroes assemble the clues in time to prevent Lady Donohue from raising the serpent and renewing her vows in a bloodbath of innocent life...?

The great thing about all this is the way the unique Hammer style has been deftly and immaculately transposed for the eighties. How can you cast a Hammer classic without Peter Wyngarde, Hazel Court, Martine Beswick, and their irreplaceable kith? Just look around, is Russell's solution: they're here, only the names in the credits change. Davis and Oxenburg scream fetchingly in designer frocks and never let their feelings about the dialogue slip; while Donohue is a true Joan Collins for the style mag era, a great English vamp in the aristocratic mould. The boys have more trouble with their lines — Grant, who has been in ostensibly serious British films, has occasional difficulty holding the giggles — but they're well used, and it's nice to see a fine character comedian like Capaldi, whose unobtrusive work redeemed *Dangerous Acquaintances*,

Concluded on page 46

Mark Hamill and Kitty Aldridge in "Slipstream"



settlement of his kind in the airless reaches where humans cannot live. (I love it. I feel betrayed...) But hunters are on his trail: psychotically single-minded lawman Mark Hamill ("I'm fed up with wimpos, Larry! I want to play a psychotically single-minded lawman!") and rugged individualist, entrepreneur, and loser Bill Paxton. Who will win the struggle for the android's elusive soul? Will humanity's last hope be ripped away on the *Slipstream*?

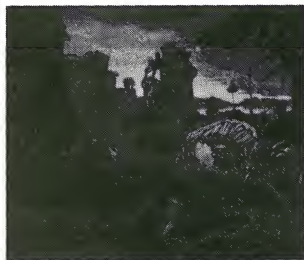
Trying to untangle the exact pattern of what went so horribly wrong with this movie is like fingering through the rubble of a collapsed building. Gary Kurtz has been involved with some massive hits, but this film marks his comeback to production after a highly-publicized bankruptcy; director Steven Lisberger cut an excellent debut with *Tron* but bombed with his stab at light comedy *Hot Pursuit* (unreleased

the time, and little trace of its effects in the human landscape. Huge tracts of ineffectual explanatory dialogue draw notice to glaring inadequacies of plot and motivation; and the pace and editing are so haphazard, presumably after many weary recuts, that ends of scenes seem decided by a pin in the script. It's hard to convey the kind of numb horror that comes over you as you watch this queue of bewildered people commit acts of ritual poltch with large-denomination banknotes. It's like a slow-motion replay of the Suez crisis, as if we were trying to fool the world our film industry was still an imperial power. You find yourself hoping against hope it was just Kuwaiti money.

How pleasing, then, to one's pride in the national heritage to be able to turn to a load of utter cod's bollocks like *The Lair of the White Worm*. Bram

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DAVID PRINGLE
FOREWORD BY BRIAN ALDISS

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Marianne Puxley Cronus

"Either we go into a Community or you have an abortion."

Tyrrell delivered his ultimatum to Rhea stonily. He couldn't face the idea of not being able to provide properly for his child, and decently paid jobs outside the Communities were getting scarcer and scarcer. Tyrrell was a skilled tecexec, and a Community was the obvious place for him to work, but Rhea was obstinately against entering one. The issue had caused the first serious row of their short marriage.

"If we enter a Community I'll probably abort anyway!" yelled Rhea.

"Geeshit!" Tyrrell's temper broke. "To hear you talk, anyone would think you were a baneful Green-woman. You've been looking a bit like one recently too. Maybe you should join them."

Rhea recoiled, mortified by his insult. She had no wish to be associated with the drab, wailing line of green-painted harridans who prophesied doom outside the gates of the Communities. The Greenwomen were known to be hideous. "How could I be a Green-woman?" she retorted tearfully. "I'm a wife, and I'm having a child."

So, in order to keep that child, she agreed to go into a Community.

The Community that Tyrrell was posted to was the largest one, Cronus A, on the Suffolk coast. Rhea would have preferred to go to one of the smaller ones, like Cottus, or Briareus, or Gyges, where the installations were underground. Cronus was the oldest Community, and all the service installations were above ground, blocking the views of the sea. But Tyrrell had to go where he was needed, and despite her doubts about the Community's safety, Rhea had to admit that living in Cronus was a lot more comfortable than trying to make ends meet outside.

The surveillance bothered her at first, but of course the authorities insisted that it was essential for the security of everyone, and she got used to it after a while. She eventually accepted too that the insect transmitters in the flats were necessary for the quick relay of information. Rhea even got to quite enjoy the monitoring sessions for wives and children. The tokens she saved from the sessions enabled her to buy luxuries she hadn't been able to afford before. She would have liked to know the results of her monitoring, but she grudgingly conceded that the authorities could probably be trusted to let people know if there was a problem. Otherwise, as Tyrrell pointed out, why would they bother to monitor people at all? Rhea did ask, once, what happened if you didn't present your-

self for monitoring, but was met with blank incomprehension. "Well, what would be the point of that, dear?" said Tracey, a friendly retiree. "You wouldn't get your M-tokens then, would you?"

Although Rhea couldn't avoid joining the Wives' Federation – every wife in Community was automatically a member – she still felt too much of an outsider to go to the W.F. coffee mornings. She could just imagine all that chat about the upgrading of the flats and extra-long-life baby-food and Ray-ban window blinds. Rhea couldn't stomach it. Who did they think they were kidding? If the balloon went up, everyone would go up with it, eventually. Living in a Grade 1 flat would just prolong the agony. Rhea knew that if she expressed these thoughts to other wives she would be listed as a subversive and Tyrrell would lose his job. So she kept herself to herself, and concentrated on preparing for the arrival of her baby. She ordered a Rhythmo-snooze cot from the token catalogue and trimmed it herself. She bought a prenatal exercise viz-tape and worked out daily. And she read everything she could about the Maximum Immunity diet, and followed it religiously.

As the weeks went by, Rhea was able to suppress most of her fears. Her pregnancy made her feel soporific and introverted. She didn't want to think or question much. She figured that in time she would become like everyone else in the Community. They seemed to be able to ignore the risks completely. Indeed, some of the second generation residents seemed genuinely unaware that there were any risks. The fashionable jokes about the paranoid Greenies outside were repeated and laughed at ritually. No-one felt threatened by the Greenies any more; they were just a demented out-group, a convenient butt for denigrating humour.

For relaxation during the heavy days of waiting, Rhea pottered in the tiny garden. Despite her reclusive tendencies she found herself chatting to one of the other young wives who shared the garden. This wife, Treza, was an energetic and vivacious soul and it was impossible to avoid her. She was bent on bringing Rhea out of herself. Treza had three children. Rhea didn't like to ask why, and she never did find out which of them was adopted. Treza spent a lot of her time ferrying her children to and from dancing lessons, skating sessions, ball-games and encounter clubs. All this activity, Treza insisted, was essential for a child's healthy development. She didn't consider the passive home life of video-games and screen-

friends to be sufficient.

"Do you know that some of the kids in this block hardly ever go outdoors?" she exclaimed indignantly to Rhea. "Our three asked them all to a party last Solstice and most of them said they'd 'tune in'. They only live a few metres away, but they'd rather tune in than stir themselves to come here." Treza's own children were a happy, lively and creative trio. Rhea hoped that she would be as successful as a mother.

Rhea was struck by Treza's intelligence and capability in other areas too, and asked her if she ever regretted being a wife. "You could have been educated, Treza. You could have been a feminist and had a career."

"Hell, no," Treza answered roundly. "I love being a wife. I love my flat and I couldn't do without my kids. I'd hate to be one of those dried-up, barren careerists. They all end up more unfeeling and authoritarian than the men. Those fin-de-siècle feminists would weep to see how their ideas have been perverted – as unrealistic as they were. Besides, I think when there is so little paid employment around it makes sense to leave it to the men. Men are hopeless at everything intuitive and life-connected, like home-making and child-rearing. They're better in industry, out of the way."

Rhea thought of Tyrrell and had to agree with Treza. Like her mother before her, Rhea had become a wife because she was terrified of remaining celibate and alone, and, unlike the Greenwomen, she had been conditioned not to be attracted to others of her sex. Besides, it would have been unthinkable for anyone in her family to become a Greenie. People in their sector just did not translocate. So wifehood seemed the only option open to her.

At times she did rail against Tyrrell's emotional inarticulacy, his lack of tenderness, and his view of her as a functional domestic servant without right to any opinions or – hell forbid – any emotions of her own. But, like her mother before her, Rhea railed silently. Tyrrell was, after all, a man, and had not been conditioned to express emotions or to acknowledge them in others. She was, after all, a wife, and had elected to become one. It was futile to expect more of Tyrrell, or of wifehood.

Being around Treza made Rhea more acceptant of her lot. Treza did, as she said, love being a wife. She sewed and baked and made wine, and was constantly re-decorating or altering her flat. Some of that was illegal, but Rhea didn't care. "I hate that standard-issue wall covering, and those blinds, even if they are 'Ray-ban'. They're an awful colour." Somehow Treza managed to get away with her petty subversions. She was so popular that it was very unlikely that any of her friends would report her.

Treza kept trying to involve Rhea in the W.F. activities. She edited the Federation Faxmag and wanted Rhea to write for that. "I know you don't enjoy the coffee-morning small-talk, but there are other things you can participate in. You have to keep your mind alive, especially when you're pregnant. It's so easy to get cut-off and depressed. Community spirit can be very supportive."

But Rhea felt quite self-sufficient and resisted Treza's persuasions. She even got exemption from the last two monthly W.F. talks, on health grounds. She

said she'd tune in, but didn't. She was sick of the anodyne paeans of praise for Central Office and all its doings. Anyway, she got the lectures second-hand from Tyrrell after he'd been to his workers' pep-talks. Rhea certainly didn't feel in need of support from this particular community. Or at least she hadn't, until recently.

When Rhea was entering her final month of pregnancy things started to happen in the Community which completely undermined her quietude. She needed someone to tell her it would be all right, that there was really no cause for alarm; someone friendly, someone she could trust. The viznews was no good:

"Cronus Service Community viznews: Routine Amber precautions should still be observed throughout the Community. There is no cause for alarm. There is no evidence of any danger to the installations or to the residents of the Community. Amber-code precautions are merely being observed in order to ensure absolute safety. As an extra safeguard some movements and telecalls to areas outside the Community have been restricted. Should you have urgent need to journey or call to the outside you should make application to your section advisor. Call your Community counsellor if you have any other problems relating to the precautions. Your counsellor is there to help you. **** Remember, your security is our priority. **** Have a nice day."

This legend had been intermittently displayed on the domestic vizscreens and transmitted in reassuring tones on the Inspec for weeks. It was followed by a list of the Amber-code precautions. As if anyone would forget them.

"And as if they would do any good if there really was something wrong!" Rhea shouted at the screen as she scrubbed vegetables under a running tap.

Tyrrell berated Rhea for her scepticism. "You're just panicky because you're pregnant. Pregnant wives are always irrational. Do you really think they'd let us sit here and rot if there was something seriously wrong?"

"But what would they do with us if we weren't here?" argued Rhea. "Where would we go? Where would they put us? They couldn't evacuate the entire Community. They're desperate that news of the Amber alert doesn't get out to the rest of the country. They won't even let us make telecalls out. And that reporter was shot at the perimeter the other day."

Tyrrell's face was livid. "What? Who told you that?"

"Treza's kids. They saw it happen."

"Those baneful kids! They're always out of bounds. She's got no control over them. Why don't they stay in the block like other kids?"

"Treza thinks it's better for children..."

Tyrrell cut Rhea short. "Treza, Treza. I'm sick of Treza's theories on child rearing. I don't want my son reared on any crackpot retrogressive ideas. Kids have to cope with the modern world, and raising them in an old-fashioned, nostalgic illusion of...of home cooking and...'creative expression' isn't doing them any favours. Those kids shouldn't have been anywhere near the perimeter – and they should have the sense to keep their mouths shut about anything like

that they see. They'll get themselves into serious trouble with the squad."

"So you would rather no-one knew that a reporter had been shot? You would rather we were all kept in the dark like the proverbial mushrooms..."

"Yes. Yes, I would rather, because wives like you panic at the slightest thing. So I'm subjected to hysterical outbursts every time I get home from work. I'd much rather you didn't know what was going on. Those things don't concern you. You're a wife, try and remember that... Where the hell is the Soothall?" Tyrrell was banging around in the washroom cabinet. Rhea's heart sank. Oh hell, she had forgotten to replace the Soothall. Tyrrell had used it so copiously recently; it had completely slipped her mind.

"I...I'll order some tomorrow," she said in a small voice.

"Geeshit!" stormed Tyrrell. "As if being scrubbed all the time isn't enough! Now there's no canking Soothall. I'm red-raw all over. What am I meant to do?"

Next morning, standing in line at the monitoring session, Rhea mulled over that conversation with Tyrrell. "My son," he had said, "I don't want my son reared on any retrogressive ideas." Rhea put her hands on her ballooning belly and wondered—would she have a son? How would she condition a son, to be a man...like Tyrrell? The idea was alien to her, it felt alien to her body. She didn't want to create another Tyrrell. She felt a stab of guilt at that admission, yet she wanted to explore it. Treza...she could share her thoughts with Treza. Treza would have some sane way of looking at things. Jay, one of Treza's children, was a boy, she had had to deal with that problem.

Rhea searched the cluster of wives and children round the monitoring booths; no Treza, or Jay or Zoë or Tee. In fact the group seemed quite diminished. Because Rhea knew so few people she couldn't be sure who was missing, but there seemed to be far fewer babies and toddlers around. She asked the overseer about Treza. He was unhelpful. "I'm afraid we can't give out any information about people on the register."

Iris, a friend of Treza's, rapped Rhea on the shoulder and whispered confidentially, "Home monitoring."

"Oh," said Rhea. "Is she ill? What's the matter?"

The other wife seemed surprised at Rhea's question and gave her a penetrating look. "Well, you know...she's...not well. There's a bug going round, isn't there?"

"Oh, is there?" Rhea felt a bit foolish. "Is that why there are so few infants here?"

Iris's face became an inscrutable mask. "Yes," she said smoothly. "It's the foodpoisoning epidemic. Haven't you heard? It's taken a tragic toll of the little ones. I'm so grateful that my two are older."

Shocked, Rhea started to mumble some sympathetic platitudes, but Iris made a quick excuse and retreated through the crowd.

On her way back to her block Rhea felt contrite. She had been so bound up in her own fears and worries that she hadn't seen Treza for ages. When Treza didn't come or call Rhea had just assumed she was busy. But Treza's kids were all right, that was one

thing; Rhea had seen them only a few days previously. Treza was so careful about what she fed them, that had probably saved them. Rhea was amazed that she hadn't heard about the epidemic. Admittedly she didn't talk to people much, but why hadn't it been on the news? The reason it hasn't been on the news, she thought with disgust, is because the news is entirely taken up with the cursed Amber alert and Central Office trying to pretend that everything is really hunky dory. Rhea felt agonized sympathy for the mothers that had lost their babies. As if worry about the Amber alert wasn't enough, now the children had another enemy, salmonella.

Rhea went immediately to Treza's flat. When the door finally opened the figure behind it bore only as much resemblance to Treza as a sister or a cousin might. Bubbling, buxom Treza had been replaced by a drained, wary creature. Rhea felt tears springing to her own eyes. "Oh Treza...what's the matter?" Treza looked uncomprehending. Rhea faltered, "I mean... someone said you were ill. Have you had the food bug?"

"I'm not ill," said Treza. "I'm OK." She made no move to invite Rhea in. Rhea stood awkwardly on the step. She didn't want to say "Hell Treza, you look awful, something must be the matter," so she skirted round the issue, asking oblique questions. In the end Treza sighed and muttered in a strained, hostile way, "If you came to the W.F. gatherings you'd know what was going on. I'm not going to tell you. I can't...tell you." She started to close the door, and Rhea withdrew.

A high-pitched wailing started in the back of Rhea's brain. All at once she allowed the hideous enormity, denied for weeks, to surface; the enormity of the knowledge that something was certainly, terribly wrong in the installation. And, oh hell, she did need support from somewhere. Treza had been her light, her link with a pleasant reality, for months, and now Treza was a demented ghost.

So Rhea dragged herself to the W.F. coffee morning.

She hesitated in the corridor, breathing deeply. The Whitesands Section Neighbourhood Centre smelled reassuringly of antiseptic and polish. Childhood scene evoked; a hospital, broken arm (birthday new skates), high-pitched wailing, friendly doctor; "Don't cry dear, it will be all right. There's no cause for alarm."

From behind the frosted glass door came the chatter and clink of the gathering. Another wife walked past Rhea and also paused in front of the door. Her face was swollen from crying, but before she opened the door she blew her nose and forced her mouth into the twisted semblance of a smile. The high-pitched wailing persisted in Rhea's head. Normality, cling to normality. It will be all right. There's no cause for alarm.

Rhea moved slowly towards the door and pushed it open. Wives turned to look at her, a stranger, briefly smiled tight, wam smiles, and continued their conversations. Occasionally a harsh, mirthless laugh would rise above the murmur. Then everyone would look embarrassed and move closer in their huddles. Rhea got her coffee from the machine and drifted, with the others, towards the ranked seats. She felt unable to start a conversation, but somehow just being there,

among other human beings, helped. Although the atmosphere was tense, there was some semblance of normality. Everyone wouldn't be here if...if the worst had happened...surely. Normality, cling to the idea of normality.

The catalogue merchandiser, with her stiff hair and tight suit, placed some repro-rosewood boxes on the table. "Good morning ladies. This is the Shaker...It already knows how to make twenty standard cocktails, and it has room for you to programme up to thirty more. After that, all you have to do is make sure that the right ingredients are in the cabinet...here..." The merchandiser posed archly with one finger extended; "...and order your favourite poison." The wives smiled and inclined their heads appreciatively. "And what's more, you can make up any exotic names you like for your cocktails. If you want to call them 'Mother's Escape' or 'Whitesands Wonder', your Shaker will oblige...We have one for you to sample today which I've called 'Community Spirit'. If you like it, the Shaker will readily give you the recipe..."

There was a token smattering of applause and Edwina, the chief of the W.F., stood up to deliver her homily. Her theme was "Sacrifice." Rhea couldn't take in most of what was said, but she supposed it was because she'd never subscribed to a Ra-ra-team kind of ideology. Edwina chirped on about the wives holding the future of the Community in their hands, about the husbands' jobs depending on them doing what was right, and about the present time being a test of their loyalty to Central Office.

The wailing in Rhea's soul got louder.

After the talk the wives were served tiny tumblers of sweet-scented "Community Spirit." Rhea rested her tumbler on her belly and tried to interact. She felt like an outsider in a club where everyone else spoke in code. She couldn't fathom the wives' words, their expressions, or the vibes. Perhaps Tyrrell was right, perhaps the hormones of pregnancy had affected her perception. She drifted towards one young wife, Doris. Doris appeared to be talking to no-one in particular, so Rhea stood in the space she was talking to. Doris was saying, distractedly, "I unfroze the ranch-pie yesterday and then re-froze it today. Do you suppose it will be all right for tomorrow?"

Rhea was glad to be able to snap into practicality. "Oh, no," she said. "You mustn't do that. Unfreezing and then re-freezing can give rise to salmonella poisoning."

"Yes," intoned Doris, glazedly, "I know."

Rhea stared at her, stupefied. The W.F. chief appeared behind Doris, took her by the arm and turned her away from Rhea. Rhea heard her say to Doris, "C-tabs are much better dear. They're painless, and untraceable. We can get some for you."

The high-pitched wailing stops. In Rhea's head there is now no room for anything except pounding silence.

Treza is against the back wall. Her eyes avoid Rhea but Rhea makes her way (how?) across the room and confronts the thin figure. Treza clasps her arms defensively across herself and stares at the floor. Rhea whispers (or screams) her challenge; "Treza...they're killing their children!"

Even in the moment of certainty she wants Treza



Illustration by Jonathan Coleclough

to deny it. Treza's mouth is contorted, her voice a rasping croak, but her tears have long since dried up. "Well, what would you do? Let them rot slowly? Children under seven don't stand a chance." Treza's voice sinks lower and lower. She is reciting the lesson she's recited to herself innumerable torturing times. "And they would be diagnosed as suffering from rad-related illnesses. The whole Community would have to close down. What would we do? Where on earth would we go?"

Rhea is overcome by waves of nausea. She stands swaying against a chair-back for an eternity. The lump in her womb feels like an aberration, a tumour. What will she bring into the world? And what a world to bring anyone into! She blurts out, "What about your three?" Treza flinches and emits small, desperate, panting sounds. She gives her former friend a look of rabid, tormented hatred. It is the look of an animal seeping its life-blood into the jaws of a trap. Treza seems about to speak, then she clamps her mouth shut and shakes her head. Still whimpering, she sidles along the wall towards the door, brutish, rabid.

That evening, Rhea escaped. The kids helped, Treza's kids. They were full of scheming ingenuity, and Rhea knew that they'd "escaped" through the perimeter before, just for fun.

Rhea looked back towards the fences, the eerie glow of the installations, and the three small figures silhouetted against the mesh. Jay was 12, Zoë was 10, and little Tee was just seven. There was something hard and kicking in Rhea's throat, hard and kicking inside her ribcage, hard and kicking in her womb. She willed energy into her legs and walked away.

Rhea was agast that other wives weren't trying to escape. They had obviously been too well indoctrinated by Inspec, Viznews and W.F. talks. Even Treza — although Treza was alternative in some ways — was still as locked in to the system as the most brittle, enamelled automaton in the W.F. Everyone, even Treza, had entered Central Office's conspiracy of silence, feeling that they had no choice. And so, the Community was ingesting itself. Cronus was eating his children.

Dazed and distraught though she was, there was one diamond-certainty in Rhea's consciousness; Cronus was not going to eat her child. However slim its chance of survival, she was going to give it that chance.

Adrenalin is a good painkiller. Although heavily pregnant and unsuitably shod, Rhea walked without discomfort to the site of the Greenwomen's camp, five kilometres from the Community perimeter. The children had given her clear directions, but she could see no lights where the camp was meant to be. She flashed her torch along the roadside; yes, there was the make-shift sign. She and Tyrrell had passed it the day they entered the Community. The high hedges were intact, but the gate was smashed and in the large enclosure there were no trailers, no tents. Only a few charred poles showed where some benders had been. Of course, the Greenwomen had their own monitoring systems, they would know about the leak... or whatever it was... and they wouldn't stick around. The camp was too close to the Community. Black panic engulfed Rhea. Even though she had escaped from

the Community she wasn't safe. She and her baby were probably irrevocably contaminated anyway. All at once she could feel the leaden exhaustion, the cold, and the pain from the broken blisters on her feet. There was no escape. She collapsed, shivering, next to a log-seat, by the ash of many camp-fires.

A headlamp beam swung into the gate of the deserted camp. Rhea cowered, terrified. Tyrrell must have reported her missing; the Community squad had come for her.

The jalopy shuddered to a halt and two figures in protecto-suits and masks got out. They went quickly to a half-dismantled shed, and emerged carrying a box of old books. They loaded the box into the jalopy and prepared to skim off. Rhea's overtaxed brain clicked into operation, drew some conclusions, and galvanized her. "No!" she screamed. "I'm here! Please... help me. Take me with you."

The two Greenwomen that picked Rhea up were called Terra and Gaea. They were acceptant and sympathetic. They perfectly understood Rhea's plight and required no long explanations. They tucked Rhea up with a rug in the rear of the jalopy.

The trio skimmed swiftly through dark, depopulated countryside. Rhea was only half awake, but she roused herself enough to ask, "Why aren't there any lights?"

"We told the farmers," said Gaea. "They evacuated weeks ago."

"So... does the rest of the country... the world... know?" Rhea gasped.

"Oh no," the Greenwoman growled bitterly. "The big conurbations are completely unaware. There's a total media blackout. To even mention the Communities in the news at the moment is a reasonable offence. Anyone who tries to tell the truth runs the risk of being summarily executed. We called a reporter we knew, and the poor guy was shot when he tried to check on the story."

Terra chimed in: "The C.O. troops attacked our camp because they knew our rad readings would show us there was something wrong, and that we'd spread the news. Luckily, most of the women had already gone... we were expecting an attack. But the troops butchered seventeen people and burned all the tents that were left. They attacked our sister camps as well... and some of them weren't prepared. The one at Gyges was totally destroyed. They killed nearly everyone." Terra's voice was deep and hard and angry through her mask. "The baneful boors," she spat, finally.

After a silence, Gaea spoke, more softly. "So we've decided to give the barbarians at Central Office what they've wanted all these years."

There were dockside smells and sounds; salt/tar/oil; the clank of chain winches, the creak and slap of vessels at mooring. Rhea clambered out of the jalopy. As she did so a pain came sharp and insistent in her lower abdomen.

The quay was only dimly lit, but there was much activity along its length. Women in boiler-suits or protecto-suits were preparing several small ships for departure. The atmosphere was one of subdued,

efficient urgency. Rhea gazed up at the nearest ship. At the top of the shadowy curve of its prow she could just make out the name, *Spes Bona*, *Gaea* and *Terra* shepherded Rhea over the wet, refuse-strewn wharf. There was a rickety gang-plank, a sudden stretch of scary dark water far below, and then a warm opening in the ship's side, and firm hands helping her.

Rhea smiled gratefully at the friendly faces in the ship's corridor; they were fresh, healthy faces, and not one of them was green. The other sectors of society told lurid tales of the Greenwomen's arcane face-painting rituals. But of course, thought Rhea, that'll only be for camouflage. If I had Community squad snipers taking pot shots at me all the time, I'd paint my face green and wear drab overalls too.

The Greenwomen scrubbed Rhea with de-contam., gently though, not like the Community scrubbers, and then put her to bed in a cosy cabin. Adrienne, who had been introduced as the ship's doctor, gave Rhea a K.I. implant. "I don't want to kid you," she told Rhea, "this won't automatically decontaminate you internally. You, and everyone in the Community, should have had these implants for weeks."

Rhea was once again appalled by the wickedness of those in charge of the Community and by the ignorant complicity of those within it. "For pity's sake, why aren't the authorities giving this to people if it can help?" she cried.

Adrienne snorted. "Because if they gave people K.I. openly they'd be admitting that it was necessary... and therefore that there was widespread serious contamination... and that's the last thing they want to admit. However, we have heard that they're including K.I. in the vitamin pills given to pregnant wives, and there's a rumour that they've started to put it in the Community's water supply. Even then, it would only be about 60% effective... but it means that you do stand a fairly good chance, and so does your baby."

The ship's engines throbbed into life deep down below decks. Rhea's contractions had started in earnest. Adrienne dimmed the lamps and propped Rhea up with lots of pillows. "Walk around a bit if it feels better that way," she said. "Don't think that you have to stay in bed."

Gaea appeared in the doorway and announced that she was going to keep Rhea company. Rhea was touched. Both Greenwomen seemed quite experienced midwives, and they calmly reassured Rhea. "Don't worry," said *Gaea*, "it's natural that the stress has brought your labour on a bit early... but a week or so is nothing. There's no cause for alarm. Everything's looking normal." Rhea was surprised at their competence in this area, but then she remembered seeing several children among the people on board. The Greenwomen must go in for artificial insemination then. That was yet another thing that the main sectors of society didn't know about them.

The pains gripped Rhea more frequently – an obvious rhythm now. As the ship's engines beat more urgently Rhea could hear the shouts of the crew – strong, proficient shouts. The Greenwomen obviously knew what they were doing. Rhea felt admiration for their adaptability and seamanship. A few of the coarse jokes in circulation about "the Greenies" surfaced in Rhea's mind and she suppressed them guiltily. Some of the Greenwomen she had seen were

indeed were deep-voiced and burly, but so what, they seemed kind and capable and, above all, sane in this crazy world. Rhea was glad to be among them. She lay back and surrendered to the contractions. The ship's propellers churned into action. Freed from its moorings the vessel shuddered and wheeled slowly to confront the sea. Rhea suddenly realized that she had no idea of their destination, or of how they had managed to evade the Port Authorities. She had been so exhausted that she had followed the Greenwomen unquestioningly. She looked at *Gaea*, who was sitting quietly reading with one hand on Rhea's foot. Rhea thought of asking where they were going, and then realized that she didn't care. All she wanted was for the birth to be over and for the baby to be healthy. Nothing else mattered right now. The ship creaked and rolled slightly and the lamps swung to and fro, bringing the little cabin alive with moving shadows.

During the long sweaty hours that followed, Rhea's pain seemed to swell and ebb with the waves. The whole ship seemed to be straining for the birth. Although she was vacillating between sleepy semi-consciousness and intense aching alertness, Rhea was constantly aware of the supportive presence of the Greenwomen. While Adrienne checked on a cervical dilation or foetal heartbeat, she hummed a soft lullaby, a husky, murmurous incantation rooted in the spirit of her African forebears. *Gaea* smoothed back Rhea's hair, massaged her legs and back, or held her hand, tightly. The Greenwoman's hands were cool and firm and gentle.

Somewhere, in a thought bubble far removed from the pain, Rhea found herself admiring *Gaea's* hair. There were long dark swathes of it, caught in coils like the hair of the figures in ancient Japanese woodcuts. The coils gleamed in the lamplight and overshadowed *Gaea's* face. The iridescent glimmer of her ear-rings could just be seen through the strands. No one in the Community had such long hair. Rhea resolved to let hers grow when... if... (she quickly stifled that thought.) *Gaea's* hair was beautiful. Rhea remembered ruefully that she had once believed that all Greenwomen were hideous. In her vivid pink and orange boiler suit, *Gaea* looked stunning – it was just a pity about her body hair. Rhea focused on *Gaea's* forearm and the hand that was gripping her own. *Gaea's* wrists and hands were slender and delicate, and the skin was soft and golden, but they were closely covered with fine black hair. Rhea almost giggled. Tyrrell would have hated that. He had insisted that Rhea depil her legs and armpits every few days. The thought of Tyrrell made her mindful of the baby once more. What if it was a boy...?

The second stage of Rhea's labour started and a sensation of tremendous pressure took over her mind. The only thing that penetrated it was *Gaea's* kindly voice saying: "Come on, push honey... you're doing well... everything's going to be fine."

In the early morning the sea grew calmer. There was a sudden high, clear, transcendent relaxation in Rhea's consciousness, clearer and higher than any dope-buzz. As the baby slithered out of her, Rhea glimpsed the dawn through the porthole. Ocean and sky were one, a smooth pearl-grey; only on the horizon was a faint smear of pink.

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Rhea's baby was a boy. Amidst the tears of exhaustion and elation and relief she was aware of a disappointment. "Oh dear," she smiled weakly at Gaea, who was holding the small bundle after the K.I. treatment. "How am I ever going to bring up a boy...if I... stay with you? I don't want him to be a man...like my husband."

Gaea gave Rhea a quizzical look. "It doesn't have to be like that... It won't be, if you stay with us."

"Yes..." Rhea hesitated: "...how do you cope with boy children? I mean...what happens to them when they grow up?" Gaea's dark eyes twinkled with mirth. Adrienne chortled richly. Rhea continued, discomfited. "Well...people say you're...I mean...I didn't even know that Greenwomen had children...and some of them must be boys...mustn't they?"

"Oh yes." Still twinkling, Gaea gave Rhea her boy-child to hold. The Greenwoman then straightened her face and said with mock solemnity, "I'm afraid...boy-children suffer a terrible fate. They grow up to be... like me." Gaea grinned gleefully.

Rhea was nonplussed and embarrassed. "What do you mean? I'm talking about males. You're not..."

"Oh yes I am," chuckled Gaea. "Lots of us are. You've already met Terra. She's also male."

Rhea's eyes widened. "Oh dear. I'm so sorry. I just assumed...I don't know why..." she stammered.

"Don't apologize," Gaea smiled. "There's no need. Why on earth should I mind being mistaken for a female? Besides, it's a very easy mistake to make. We don't advertise our gender differences, we don't think they're particularly important."

The first rays of the sun were just striking through the porthole. Rhea stared at Gaea, amazed at how her own assumptions could cloud her perception. Gaea was now quite obviously male, but because of her gentleness and sensitivity, her ability to empathize and, especially, her supportive strength during the baby's delivery, it had simply never occurred to Rhea that she wasn't female.

"Anyway," said Gaea, "we can talk about that stuff later. You should get some rest now. Is she OK there?"

"She?" queried Rhea. "Oh...SHE..." The new mother looked down at her baby. "Yes...she's fine thanks."

Gaea turned out the lamps, Adrienne patted Rhea's arm, and they left the cabin quietly.

Rhea snuggled into the warm, yeasty smell of her child. She would call her Zee - the sea. The baby grizzled a bit at the breast. "Don't cry, dear," whispered Rhea. "It will be all right. There's no cause for alarm."

Spes Bona surged on towards the sun.

Marianne Puxley is a South African dissident currently living and travelling on a narrowboat in the Midlands. She has been a street-theatre performer and playwright, and a teacher in various institutions - schools, universities and prisons. She has also written occasional journalism for the Guardian and New Internationalist, but the above is her first published sf story.

Lisa Tuttle

Interview by Stan Nicholls

If the bomb dropped, and we all found ourselves huddled around a camp fire, would you be the one telling us stories?

Probably not, unless there was no one else to do it. I'm more of a writer than a storyteller. I like playing with words, and writing things down, rather than just thinking of a story and telling it. I'm not a great verbal storyteller; I mean, I find it hard to remember jokes. But I know the distinction, because George R.R. Martin — with whom I collaborated on my first novel — sees himself as a storyteller. I can remember one of his stories, set in an after-the-bomb world, and the character he obviously identified with was a guy who goes around with a guitar singing ballads. George is now working in Hollywood, and if you're a storyteller, that medium is maybe more flexible. Whereas I feel I am a writer. I don't even know what story I'm going to tell until I'm actually writing it. I may produce a sentence like, "She slammed the door." I don't know what happens next, but I know she's angry, she wants to leave. The story "becomes" as it's written down, even if I'm flailing around trying to find the next line. Of course I have to have some sort of idea before I start; maybe I'll know what the ending will be, or what happens along the way. But for me the story doesn't exist until I write it. I don't feel that there's a story already shaped just waiting to be translated into words.

What was your experience in collaborating with George Martin?

It worked quite well. I don't know if it still would, because for one thing we were both younger, and less set in our ways as writers. In *Windhaven*, we came up with a world where wings are handed down from generation to generation. And here's someone who has no legal, social right to these wings, but who can fly, and should have them by any kind of objective standard. But her society isn't structured in such a way that she can. We had three possibilities: either she'll work out how to get them, or she'll fight the good fight and lose them; the third alternative was sadder but wiser — having her go down in flames, so to speak. We preferred that she win through, but it was a matter of actually writing it to discover how that was going to happen. One difference between George and me, simplifying wildly, is I tend to under-



Photographs by Dick Jude

write and he tends to overwrite. He'd have lots of descriptions, I'd have very few. We wrote the scenes alternately, then went over each other's work, adding or cutting as we went along. I felt our styles were quite compatible, and we achieved a style that was neither of us. Howard Waldrop and George did a collaboration together, and you could tell every point where Howard stopped, and George took over. Their styles are totally different, so it comes across as two voices.

Why write the fantastic?

I started concentrating on sf and fantasy because I'd read a lot — I was a fan — and naturally I wanted to get published. I was submitting stories, and *The New Yorker* would send a rejection slip, *Cosmopolitan* would send a rejection slip, *Mademoiselle* would send a rejection slip. Seventeen would send a rejection slip... But Ted White at *Amazing*, or Charles Platt at *New Worlds*, would respond with little notes, saying I like your style, or whatever. I was getting more encouragement from science-fiction markets.

I went to Clarion in 1971, following my first year at college. In creative writing classes there's often the attitude that you're writing for your own satisfaction, with no great emphasis on selling. But at Clarion everyone assumed that of course you wanted to sell your stories. So you had to finish them, send them out, and keep sending them until they sold. This attitude really helped

me. You thought, I can do that, I don't have to wait until magically I become an author. I know people who've been writing for years and think they're not ready. But it's all internal. They haven't had an editor say, "You're not ready." Nothing's ever going to happen if you keep your manuscripts in a drawer. At Clarion I was knocking myself out trying to write a real science-fiction story, purely to get published. It wasn't so much that I had a science-fiction idea; it may have been that I wanted to tell a story about a lonely person, or someone who's in love with someone who doesn't love her, and I would think, well, I could put this in the future. I sold my first story to Robin Scott Wilson for the *Clarion 2* anthology, about six weeks after the end of the workshop. Two or three months later I sold a story to *F&SF*. Then I sold one to *Last Dangerous Visions*, and another to a Roger Elwood anthology.

Is Clarion tough?

It's absolutely uncompromising. I loved it. It tends to attract people who are already devoting time, talent, and ability to becoming serious writers. It's tough in the sense that it's aimed at future professionals, it's not meant for people who just want a nice creative experience. Six weeks is quite a commitment, so it's no surprise there's a high level of success. By the time someone goes to Clarion they're probably already pretty determined.

Do you go in for a lot of revision?

Yes. Take *Gabriel* as an example; that novel was nearly finished, written entirely in the third person, when I realized it wasn't working, and I began again in the first person. Sometimes I'll change characters. In a story I had in *Interzone*, "Memories of the Body," my heroine had a lover with a servant, who she subsequently discovers is an android. It didn't work. I must have rewritten nearly the whole thing before putting it aside. When I came back to it, I began with completely different characters, but the same basic idea. As for other kinds of rewriting, sometimes it gets a bit obsessive because I'm not producing anything new, but rather changing a sentence here and a word there, cutting something out, adding something new...Major reworking tends to go on before I finish a story.

Sometimes there's that point where I'm polishing and polishing, and listening to the tone of the piece, and think it sounds too brittle. Or the language is too precise, or a bit distant. Often it takes me a long time before I realize this is basically it. I have a certain impatience, plus wanting to get on to something else; not to mention the need to make a living, which stops me before I get into rewriting obsessively. One thing I've found over the years is how long it can sometimes take to write a story.

Do story ideas come easily to you?

I get ideas all the time. Very often they are responses to something like a movie or a book. Maybe there's an idea that isn't developed, or I feel they've handled it the wrong way. In reaction I'll think how I would have done it. Occasionally I get the feeling that I can't continue with whatever it is I'm working on, and if I force myself to write, it's completely wooden. In those cases I usually go on to something else. Earlier this year (1988) I had the urge

to abandon the novel I'm writing. I felt it was too complicated, and a mistake. I had an idea for another novel, which would be much shorter, and I knew exactly how it was going to begin. Almost against my will it was forming itself, but I had to admit I didn't know how the new idea was going to end either, and realized I could get stuck in the middle of that one too. Then where would I be? I'd have two unfinished novels on my hands. So I decided to stick with the one I was working on.

Something I find very useful is to take things to a group I get together with. The membership shifts slightly from time to time; currently it includes Robert Holdstock, Garry Kilworth, David Wingrove, Bobbie Lamming, Chris Evans, Dave Garnett, Geoff Ryman, among others. We circulate our stories then we get together to talk about them. Of course some people don't like workshoping, or can't take criticism; they feel what they've written is what they've written and that's it. But I like having people's responses, and it's particularly valuable when the criticism is from other writers. It's good to have really critical readers look at your work and say, well, it didn't work, and I think this is why.

You've worked as a journalist. Has this been a help with your fiction?

I was on a newspaper for five years. It helped me write in a direct, pared-down way, but at times I think that limits me, that it's just as much a hindrance as a help. One thing you can say about journalism is at least you don't get caught up in this whole mystical thing about writing; that you have to sit and wait for inspiration. A practical attitude is a good one to have, and journalism absolutely insists that you have it. On a newspaper, there's no point in writing something if you don't get it in on time. Another thing is com-

municating. You can lose sight of the fact that someone else is going to read what you've written, and get something out of it. In fiction you can get caught up in your own creation, but if your readers don't understand what you're getting at, the story's a failure. **What comes first with you, plot or character?**

It's usually an idea, like how would it feel to be a man who thinks he's been born in the wrong body? That he should be a woman. Or an alien. So that's not really a plot. I don't have the plot until I write the story, and it's not the character, because that comes after I've thought of the situation they're in.

When you do get around to working your characters in, where do they come from?

I suppose bits of them come from friends – sometimes rather more than I originally intended, although I never set out to write about someone I know. In the novel I'm writing now the main character's best friend is loosely based on a close friend of mine in Texas. The problem is this woman is supposed to be from New York, and when I hear her talk, she's got my friend's Texas accent! The way I feel about my friend is the way the character feels about hers; there's this warmth and closeness between them. But basically we're talking about composites.

Is there anything you dislike about the writer's life?

I would be quite happy not to have to write for a living – I feel very lucky to be able to do what I like to do, but sometimes I think it would be nice to have a "proper" job – although I'd still want to write. What I hate is there's no steady pay cheque. You can work like a demon one year and get very little in, then the following year, when you might be doing much less, suddenly the money starts arriving.

The other thing I don't like is that there's no break from it. Some people can lose themselves in their writing, but if I'm having a bad time in my life, writing only seems to intensify it. Everything is internalized, there's no escape. In a job, or even in writing short fiction, there's an end to it, and some response – whether it's "What a lousy piece of work" or "Well done." Whereas with a novel I spend so much time working on it that I don't know if it's any good or I'm wasting my time. I haven't yet got to the point where I know what the average time for a novel is, but I've been writing this one since February (1988), and I'm hoping to finish the first draft by Christmas – I feel a novel should take me about a year.

You write short stories and novels. Do you have a preference for either?

I prefer short stories. I'm getting more interested in novels, but find them very difficult. I tend to get short-story ideas, not novel ideas. Novels are really



uncharted territory for me, although that means they're more of a challenge. It's also possible to stop half way through a short story and abandon it without thinking I've wasted a year of my life.

In short fiction you can find a voice. It's getting a tone, like listening to a note in music, finding the pitch – and you can sometimes hit it absolutely right all the way through. That's harder to maintain in a novel, where the amount of time involved means you're going to be much more dependent on rewriting and polishing to keep that tone. It has to be a more conscious effort in a long piece, if only because you're in a different mood each time you sit down to write it.

When writing something fantastical, do you "believe" in it, if only for the time it takes to write?

Yes, I do. I suppose that's why I like more ambiguous subjects, where things aren't spelt out – is this a psychological situation or something supernatural? I think strange things happen all the time. I believe people have UFO experiences, but do I believe in UFOs? Well, I don't think there are these aliens coming in little ships, but I accept something happens to people. That's what interests me. If I wrote about someone who had an encounter with a UFO, I would absolutely believe in their experience. Or in ghosts, or in anything. Just because you can't measure these things on a scientific instrument doesn't mean they don't happen. I don't like the dismissive, "Well, it was all in their mind." The very act of creating fiction means you're writing about something which is not provably true. For fiction to really work it's got to be true intellectually or emotionally. So you have to believe in it when you're writing it. That's why trying to write cynically is so difficult. It's rare for someone to make lots of money from cynically writing, say, romances. The biggest-selling Mills & Boon authors are women who like romantic fiction, and write it to the best of their ability.

If you go to something like a writing school, one of the things they tell you is to write about what you know. Does that advice have any relevance for a fantasy author?

Yes. Take horror. I would say everyone has been frightened at some point and had the experience, probably as babies, of feeling utterly abandoned in a completely strange environment, and somewhere those memories are still there. I was talking to Clive Barker about the connections between fantasy and horror. We agreed that on the one side there are the horrifying things, the gross-outs. But there's also a kind of awe; the desire to get in touch with the strange, the wonder of the thing, no matter how frightening it may be. Those emotions are also behind sci-



ence fiction – being dazzled and amazed by machines, or technology, or discovering a new world. Writing what you know doesn't have to mean writing about the city you were born in or a particular job you once had. It's also about the internal realities, the emotions, which everyone knows.

Granting that horror fiction is about evoking a reaction, would you go for universal fears, like phobias?

I don't think, "What is everyone afraid of?" The first story I sold was "Stranger in the House." It was based on a fear I had as a child that there was something under my bed – I don't claim to have any great original fears! Take a story I wrote called "The Other Mother." The impulse for that was a dream in which I was walking past an office building with glass windows, and I looked in and saw someone in a long, white shroud. I was terrified this person was going to turn and look at me, because I realized as soon as I saw her that she was some kind of death goddess. I'd just read *The White Goddess* by Robert Graves, and with the white goddess – who represents both love and death – there's two faces; the creative, sustaining mother, and the merciless female who kills. I'd become interested in the conflict that women face between children and work, particularly creative work. I wanted to write a story about a mother who was also trying to be an artist. I was thinking about archetypal, mythological imagery, but also personal things – the dream, and the worry about whether I'll ever have children, and what I'd do if I did. So I think about things I've found frightening. Which for the most part tend to be universal anyway.

Are you happy with the sci/fantasy label?

Sometimes I think it's false in that perhaps people will read things of mine and say, "This isn't science fiction." Some writers don't like being labelled,

they think it cuts them off from their readership. I don't think that's true in my case. In a few years I might be cursing having a label, but at the moment I doubt I'd get any more sales or recognition if I was published differently.

There's a conflict though between not wanting to be labelled and wanting to be in order to get published. Perhaps it's true that if publishers don't know how to sell a book – which seems like a ridiculous thing for them to say – it's less likely to be taken on. I don't think it's entirely imposed by publishers; arguably readers want it because there's so much published these days. If you like science fiction at least you know which section in the bookstore to go to. And people will try to compare books that really can't be compared. When recommending a novel, you might say, "You must read Jonathan Carroll." In fact he's a good example of someone who's now being published with apparently no problem. *Land of Laughs* came out in hardcover, and didn't get a paperback printing for years, presumably because it wouldn't fit into a category. It's fantasy, but of a very particular, personal kind. But now the field has opened up so much there's a place for that sort of thing. **Does working in other media – for example films or TV – appeal to you?**

I don't feel an overwhelming urge to write movies, but maybe that's because I've never tried it. I'm planning on going to LA when I'm next in the States, and see George Martin, who's working on *Beauty and the Beast*. He asked me if I'd like to come up with storylines for the show but, frankly, I don't feel inspired to write about other people's ideas. I'd be much more likely, if I wrote for television, to do a one-off play. On the other hand there's a lot of money in the kind of thing George is doing and I want to find out

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Gary Kilworth

The Men's Room

The past is not what it used to be.

Such a provocative statement cannot but help grab your attention, but the fact is, the past has changed. It can be different the second time around: something to do with retravelling the two-way stretch of time between adulthood and... listen, have you seen that stage magicians' trick? The magician calls to her assistant, and he skips onto the stage wearing one of those skimpy costumes cut high at the thigh, black fishnet tights and high-heeled shoes: all so obviously designed to keep the attention of the women away from the magician's hands. He passes her a piece of blue ribbon. The magician takes the ribbon and runs her fingers along it. While her hand travels from left to right, the blue ribbon stays blue, but when she runs her fingers in the opposite direction the ribbon becomes red. Well, that's what can happen to time: it can change colour, from blue to red – or rather, blue to pink.

I suppose I had better explain.

Without going into too many details, let me just say that in the forty-third year of my previous life I was an electronics engineer involved in communications research. Actually, that word engineer has rather a heavy sound to it, for the delicate work I used to carry out: tiny circuits and components constructed with tools the largest of which was no bigger than a nail file. I was considered to be one of the best in the field. I came from a very modest home background – my father was a farm labourer – through grammar school and redbrick university, and by the age of forty was one of the most respected men in my profession. I owed a lot to my parents of course, who (once they understood what was required of them) used all the resources available to them to put me on the right course. There was only one other child anyway, my sister Angela, who, though she followed me through grammar school, at eighteen went and married a farmer and raised children and chickens. At the time, I thought it a terrible waste of an education. She could have gone on to do great things as a veterinary surgeon, if she had only got better exam results. Of course, she did not have the private tutors that our parents made available to me... however, that's all past history. (Or rather, future history, the future that was...).

Anyway, in my forty-third year I invented something, partly by accident, which was potentially social dynamite. Something that would change everything. Without going into too much technical detail,

which few of you men reading this article will understand because you have been socialized into believing that such things are "above your head" and therefore have developed blind spots, it was a kind of time travelling device. It could send someone one way only: back to the past.

The method involves using a series of symbols flashed from a screen. The messages are subliminal triggers which enable the human subject's nonphysical aspects – the mind and spirit – to enter a universal timefield. The physical world, which includes the subject's body, remains in the future. The mind and spirit are able to travel back to an earlier physical world.

So, I could return to an earlier version of my body. I could effectively relive the years between childhood and middle age, and if I wished, still retain the knowledge, the wisdom, and anything else I had gathered during those years. I would be a child with a man's brain. Had I wanted to, I could have refined the material that was sent back. For instance I could damp down or even obliterate memories of the life I had lived so far. In other words, I could send "myself" back and start completely anew, without reference to my former life. For obvious reasons I elected not to do this but to return to earlier years with all my faculties intact.

I have simplified this explanation to what amounts to a flavour of the whole for two reasons. One, the complete and accurate explanation would be meaningless to those who are not specialists in my field, and two, to protect my discovery from those who are.

Now, you will be asking yourselves, why didn't I announce my discovery to the world, become rich and famous, become history incarnate? The answer is, how do you prove such an invention works? I was quite certain of its worth, but then I had faith in my theories. I couldn't expect everyone to believe in me the way I did, even given that I was supposed to be brilliant. They have a habit of putting brilliant people away when their ideas seem to have overtaken known laws. Look at what they did to Galileo.

The only way, of course, was to experiment on myself. In that way I could prepare the world for my invention, before "discovering" it again. At first, I thought I would send myself back to my early twenties, but I allowed my heart to rule my head. When I sat down and thought hard about it, I ached to return to my boyhood: the gang going down to the river to swim on a hot summer's day; climbing the apple trees in the orchard; playing football on the village green;



looking for birds' eggs; shooting at water rats with my catapult. I had been raised in the country, and it was a wonderful childhood, full of golden days of skinned knees and cheeks smeared with plum juice.

So, with nostalgia pushing me hard in the back, I called my ex-wife and bid her a fond(ish) farewell and said I was leaving for South America and that I was going for good. She did not seem at all displeased and thought I was making the right decision. I caught a hint of relief in her tone. We had not had a terrible marriage, and indeed were still reasonably good friends, but I had certain – certain ways, certain desires I suppose you would call them, which when she discovered them were upsetting to her. However, that done and with my heart thumping, I went to my laboratory.

I awoke in my old bed in the tied cottage, surprised at how lumpy it felt. I thought then that perhaps I should prepare myself for a few shocks: that age had coloured my vision of childhood to such an extent that I had idealized the past. However, the sunlight flowed through the ill-fitting flowery curtains onto the whitewashed walls in the way that I remembered it. The bed might have been lumpy, but it was warm, with a thick layer of blankets. I could smell the breakfast Mum was cooking in the kitchen below: fried bacon and tomatoes. From the yard outside came other smells: cherry blossom, Jo the yard dog's kennel straw, the baked earth and chickenshit, the remains of an old bonfire which was still smouldering (which I had probably lit the night before – last night).

I jumped out of bed, very excited, expecting to find

my young body difficult to deal with, psychologically. It wasn't. (It was then I realized I had *always* been twelve years old, in my mind, right up to the age of forty-three...).

I took a quick look out of the window at the world I had once known and was not disappointed. Then I looked for my clothes, but couldn't find them, so I ventured down the old wooden staircase that led to the scullery and kitchen. The year, by the way, was 1953. It was my favourite childhood year. But I was to receive many shocks which I shall attempt to convey in the style, rather than the content, of this document.

Standing over the gas stove was my mother – no, my father – yes, my father, standing over the gas stove, cooking, standing over... my father, wearing, my father wearing a faded blue dress, his hair pinned back to stop it falling in his eyes, my father wearing sensible brogues, my father with an apron on, the one covered in primroses. He looked up.

"Go upstairs and get changed out of your nightie child. You'll catch your death."

I looked down at myself. Not pajamas, but a pink nightdress with a torn hem. I felt a flush of shame creeping over my face. I tugged at the nightdress.

"There's only Angela's clothes up there," I said.

Dad took the frying pan off the stove and pushed past me, climbing the stairs, his teeth clicking.

"If that girl's playing games again..." he was muttering. I followed him up, wondering if I had got my sister a hiding. It would make a change. The first time around, it was always her getting me a licking. By the time I got to the top of the stairs my father was holding up Angela's frock.

"What's this?" he said.

"A frock," I replied.

"Get it on my boy, and no more silliness," he snapped. "I've had enough today with your mother complaining about cheese sandwiches again. I don't know how she expects me to give her ham on the money she brings home."

I went red and defiant. My father might want to wear dresses, for whatever reason, but I didn't see why I had to follow his bad example.

"I'm not wearing that."

Father looked thunderous. "You'll do as you're told. How dare you speak to me like that? I shall certainly tell your mother when she comes home, playing me up like this. What do you want? Your red dress, I suppose? I've told you a thousand times, that's for best. It's your church and party dress, and not for play."

He stormed out of the bedroom with a swish of his blue frock, and descended the stairs again, leaving me feeling bewildered and aggrieved. What the hell was happening here? Had the whole household gone mad? Why couldn't I wear my ordinary clothes? Why did I have to dress up? I tried to cast my mind back, to a time when we had some kind of folk festival, or a country fair which required us to change clothes with the females for a day, and came up with nothing.

With a strange uncomfortable feeling, I put on my sister's clothes and went down to the scullery. I felt very foolish, especially since my sister Angela was now at the pinewood table eating corn flakes. She scowled at me as I entered, but

didn't let loose the expected jibe or shrill giggle. Perhaps it was because she was wearing my trousers and braces, socks and shoes, shirt and pullover...

"Get my things off," I said, hotly.

She gaped at me for a moment, then said, "Shut yer gob."

Father came in with the frying pan at that moment. He clipped Angela around the ear with his free hand. "That's not the way we talk at the breakfast table, young lady, or anywhere for that matter."

"What's wrong with 'gob'?" said Angela. "Julia says it and her mother's a doctor. A doctor must know what a mouth's called."

"If you're not careful, you'll find out what my mouth's for – and my hand. Now get on with your breakfast. What are you doing today?"

"Gonna play footer," said Angela. I noticed how short and raggy her hair was. She used to have plaits. I reached up and found the pigtails had been transferred to my head. "Julie and Sue are comin' round."

"Julia and Susan. I'm sure their families don't approve of such nicknames, coming from such nice families as they do. You're lucky to have such friends. Most farm girls aren't..."

"I know, I know," scowled Angela. She shovelled down her corn flakes and then began wading into some bacon and tomatoes, leaving me the smallest piece.

I was too stunned to say much until now, but thought it was time to assert myself a little.

"I'm going to play football too."

Angela's mouth dropped open again, then she smirked.

"Don't be stooooopid all yer life. Boys don't play football."

I was about to protest, when Dad said, "I want you to stay and help me with the housework. I look forward to the holidays, when you're home. Afterwards, you can play with James next door."

"Play what?" I gasped.

"Dolls – or nurses – whatever it is you play at your age. And stay away from those girls in the recreation ground."

There was another smirk from Angela.

"I saw you the other day. Showin' your knickers to the girls. He was on the swings Dad."

"That's enough Angela. Now, Charles, if you want to read or draw or something, you can take your friend James up to your bedroom. You're too old for things like park swings."

"I want to play football. I want to swim in the creek. I want..." Angela kicked me under the table with her football boots. I yelled. Father cracked her round her head. She jumped up from the table, shouting, "Don't care," and clumped for the door. I followed her outside, where she turned and faced me.

"Fuck off," she snarled. "We don't want no sissy boys, see!" And then she punched me hard on the arm, before running off down the street. I couldn't help myself. I sat down on the pavement and cried. Father came out a moment later and put his arm around my shoulders, his long greying hair falling over my face, smelling of Lifebuoy soap.

"There, there. That girl's getting out of hand – far too rough. Just wait until her mother comes home..." But I knew from my own experience, having been in her shoes, that nothing would happen to Angela. Mother (if she was anything like my father) would shake her head and say, "Girls will be girls. The trouble is, she's left to run wild. I'll take her on the rabbit shoot tomorrow, at back of the farm. She'll enjoy that. Like to fire a twelve-bore shotgun, eh Angie?"

"Oh, wow, thanks Mum. You bet. Tomorrow? Promise?" "I promise," Mum would say, ruffling Angela's hair with cracked, dirty fingers fresh from the plough, smiling with a weatherbeaten face full of windcreases and tiny sundrawn veins. Then she would call, "Where's my dinner, man?" to my father, who would be in the kitchen hidden in a cloud of steam. "Nearly ready, dear," my Dad would reply. "Just mashing the potatoes." Mum would mutter, "A woman likes her meal on the table when she comes in," then stuff her pipe while she was waiting, ignoring me altogether. It would be no good me asking whether I could go shooting too. I would be told my dress would get dirty.

I had heard it all before.

What had I got myself into? My ex-wife and I used to argue about the nurture-nature thing. Deliah, like a lot of women of the 1980s, maintained that she had been socialized into an inferior role. She said her upbringing had been responsible for conditioning her behaviour. I always used my sister as an example which refuted this argument. I pointed out that Angela and myself had had the same kind of upbringing, yet I had gone on to do – well let's face it, great things – while she had fallen into the old traditional role of housewife. "As far as



I can remember," I said, "Mum and Dad treated both of us in the same way. In fact, I used to get far more hidings than she did. Angela used to get away with murder." The funny thing is, I really believed we had been treated alike as children.

So, here I was, on the other side. What the hell had happened? I've thought a lot about that since then, and can only conclude that some kind of twist in the ribbon of time is responsible. Who the hell cares, actually, what was responsible. The important question was, could I do something about it?

Anyway, halfway through that day, after Dad and I had been shopping and I had seen the rest of the world and its madness – we were not unique – I went up to my room and lay on my bed thinking. I had already checked my body thoroughly and found no changes there. I was still a male with all the masculine appendages. Anyway, Angela's breasts had been visible under her shirt at breakfast. That much remained the same. It was the rest of it that was wrong. I mean, men are physically stronger than girls. Why were we doing housework, washing, cooking? I knew why. I had helped my Dad during the morning, lugging in the coal for the fire, getting the copper boiler going to wash the clothes in, carrying the shopping from the town. My arms were aching like hell. You needed to be tough for housework.

There had to be some answer to it all.

I remembered that when I was a young boy I used to keep my treasures in a biscuit tin hidden at the back of the wardrobe.

I pulled the old, darkwood wardrobe away from the wall. There were spiders' webs joining the untreated plywood back to the wall itself. I flinched, as I pushed my hand behind the tall piece of furniture, and found ... yes, the tin box. A spider ran over the back of my hand as I pulled out my container of secrets. I blew it off with a little shudder, finding myself suppressing a scream which I knew would be expected of me in female company.

I took the tin to the bed and opened it. Inside was a variety of objects, but none that I recognized. My penknife had gone and so had the lump of galena I had pinched from a local lead mine. Instead there was a soppy letter from a girl (the spelling was appalling), a porcelain figure of a ballet dancer (a twelfth birthday present, according to the soppy letter, which I was to tell NO ONE about, even my best friend James), a magazine picture of a border collie, and one or two other things of little interest to me. One of the items *did* capture my attention, however. A photograph. It was one of my parents, taken probably in their early twenties, which would be just after they got married. They were dressed in their proper clothes.

"Shit!" I cried, delighted at the discovery.

"What did you say?" My father was in the doorway to the bedroom.

I thought fast, wanting to keep him calm for the next few minutes while I confronted him with the photo.

"Ship," I said. "Wasn't this picture taken on a ship – when you and Mum went on holiday that time, to Southend?"

The black look disappeared and he took the photo, studying it for a moment. A little frown appeared on his brow, below the blue dust cap that most house-



wives – househusbands – wore in this part of the country.

Then the frown was replaced by a wistful smile.

"Ah, I remember this. Yes, your Mum and I went to stay with Uncle James. No, it wasn't on a boat. It was just before a party. We had a lot of fun in those days..." he sighed.

"Yes," I said slyly, smoothing down my skirt, "but what about the suit? You're wearing a suit, Dad – and Mum's got a dress on."

"Fancy dress," he mused in that funny, faraway voice, as if recalling the happy times of his marriage. "Your mother and I were invited to a fancy dress party..." The little frown reappeared. "I remember worrying about your mother that night. She seemed to like wearing those stockings and suspender belt a little too much... Anyway," his voice rallied quickly, as if he had just remembered he was talking to one of his children, "it was a long time ago. Now will you come down and help me peel the carrots? I've been calling you for the last ten minutes. Your mother'll be in for her dinner, and it won't be ready. You know how upset she gets if her dinner's late."

I was dreadfully disappointed.

"I couldn't care less," I said.

"Now, now," Dad remonstrated. "Your mother works hard to keep the wolf from the door. The least we can do is see that her dinner is ready for her..."

"Screw her and bloody dinner," I shouted. "I've had enough of this. I'm getting out."

I ran from the bedroom with my father gaping after me. Down the stairs and out of the front door, into the street. I didn't care whether I got beaten black and

blue when I went back home. I was going to do all those things I did as a boy. I was a boy. I was entitled to do boys' things. Hell, that's one of the reasons I came back, to indulge in all those old pastimes.

I ran up the lane, over the back fields, and down to the tidal river of the creeklands. When I got there all those old smells, of cockle shells, and river mud, and grain-filled longboats, all of them were there. I went behind the sea wall, where the saltwort grew amongst patches of sea lavender, and stripped off. Happily, the tide was in and it was deep enough to swim. I waded out on the mud and entered the water that had been warmed by almost a day of sunshine. It was beautiful. The murky water of the creeks swirled round me as I swam – it was just like the old days – it was the old days. I stayed in for over half an hour, before striking out for the bank. When I got to the shallows there were three girls waiting, holding up my clothes.

"Put those down," I snarled, covering my genitals with my hands.

They moved closer to me, smiling, and I could see that the oldest one was about fifteen. She wore an old greasy flat cap on her tousled hair, and her jacket was smeared with dried snot on the sleeve. The baggy trousers had holes in the knees and she wore no socks on her feet: just a thick pair of laced-up boots. One of the other two took out a packet of Woodbines, and lit one, puffing away like a veteran.

"You better shut it, boysee," said the eldest, "or we might fink of frowin' this lot in the river."

"What do you want?" I said, beginning to shiver now, and tired of covering my manhood, or rather, boyhood. She went a little red.

"Want to come in the bushes, just for a while?"

Panic surged through me then. I looked along the sea wall, but there was no one in sight. A Thames barge was cruising out in the middle of the river, but too far away to attract any attention. I thought about making a dash for the grain mills, but then remembered I was naked.

"You give me my clothes," I gasped. "I'll..."

She pushed her face up to mine.

"You'll what, boysee? Scratch me eyes out?"

They all laughed. Then, encouraged by the biggest one, they crowded round me and began touching me, while I whimpered in humiliation. Then someone came, walking their dog, and I screamed. The girls ran off. One of them still had my knickers. She had them on her head, like a hat, and was laughing so much she could hardly run. I choked back my shame, remembering their filthy hands on my privates.

I dressed quickly, and then ran home. Mother was waiting for me. She gave me a wallop with her belt (thank God she didn't look under my dress) and sent me up to bed without any supper. Hell, was that bitch strong. She had muscles like iron hoops. My ridged backside testified to that.

I sobbed to myself in my bed, even after father had come up quietly, (while Mum was down the pub), to stroke my hair and give me some sorely-needed comfort. "Your mother's just worried about you, son," he said. "She doesn't want anything to happen to you."

Afterwards I planned what I had to do. I could see what the future held for me. Any spare money in the house would go into Angela's education, she being

the "important" one. All the encouragement to "get ahead" would be levelled at her. Men didn't need a good education, the way women did. So, what I had to do was change the world, change people's thinking, before I could even begin to get into a laboratory and get my hands on the right equipment, in order that I could send myself forward again. I had to get my hands on a lot of money, or into a job where the expensive equipment I needed could be made available to me.

What I had to do was start the Men's Movement.

That was twelve years ago. I am now twenty-four and am considered a radical because I advocate such things as equal job opportunities for men. It's a difficult, up-hill process, which involves raising the level of awareness of men: making them see they are entitled to want things for themselves, not just for their families, but themselves. Many of them don't like what I'm doing. Sometimes I feel my confidence ebbing.

Well hell, it's difficult having confidence in yourself when you're a man living in a world that's never heard of Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo or William Shakespeare. Sure they lived, but da Vinci spent his life doing watercolours for his grandfather, and inventing crochet patterns for his uncle. (In my world these were important people in the arts!) Who won the Battle of Waterloo? Why, the Duchess of Wellington, Lady Wellesley! Everyone knows that, doesn't they? Who of the Antarctic? Why, Jane Scott, of course. Last week I went to see a film called Queen Quong about a giant ape that climbs the Empire State Building in New York. (I seem to remember a different title).

It's difficult having confidence in yourself, in a world where most, almost all, the important people in history have been women. You begin to believe that males are less capable than females, if you're not careful. When Rita Bannister ran the four-minute mile, I cursed. Whenever I see Winifred Churchill on the news, I swear. When it was announced that Olga Gagarin was the first woman in space, I laughed hysterically. I have difficulty coping in a world where the Lady's Prayer begins with "Our Mother, which art in Heaven..." and Mary's son Jesus trailled around after his divine mother, helping her perform miracles until she died on the cross. I think – I think –

– I think, what the hell, at least I can wear bloody trousers again, without being pointed at in the street and called names... some of my friends seem satisfied with that. Satisfied with small steps and to leave the leaps to our sons, the next generation.

"They say there might be a male prime minister of Israel soon."

"That's a laugh. I'll believe it when I see it."

"I'm too busy screaming at the sight of spiders these days, like men are supposed to."

"What I really need is a strong woman to lean on."

"I often go to the men's room to have a good cry."

These are the defeatist remarks I hear from some of my friends in the movement, admittedly when things get low and look hopeless.

But I'm not out of the game yet! My work for the BBC at the moment is fairly modest. I work in the cutting room, helping to edit material to be broadcast. I fought like hell to get this job and I'm obviously here for my own reasons. My next intention is to take a course at



a university, in my spare time, in order to get inside a laboratory containing the equipment I need to make a time-travelling device. That's not going to be easy. The kind of course I'm talking about is full of women at this time and it'll take some determination to break into the sexist world of the engineer. Even if I make it, the course members will try to drive me out with ridicule and obscenities. I have to do it though, because once I have my contraption, I'm home and dry. I already have access to television programme material.

What do I intend doing? Well, I'm certainly not going to send myself back again in the hope that it will reverse-field, putting the men back on top. You see, after a lot of deep thinking I have an inkling why there was a reversal the first time. What if... what if this action, this time travel, were personal to each human subject? I mean, what if there were something in myself which determined the state of the past to which I was sending myself? What if I secretly envied the world of women and wanted to be a part of it? There are proportions of both genders in all of us: what if the quantities are so close in most cases that inquisitiveness is enough to tip the balance? I wonder what it's like to be a... and there you are. Even trivial, unimportant gestures, like trying on small items of clothing, might be enough to send someone back on the other side? I don't really know. I just have suspicions and a lot of questions. Unanswered questions. Therefore I do not intend experimenting on myself again.

It is estimated that a certain soap opera is watched by seventy percent of the viewing public. I help edit

that programme. When I have my device I'm going to send millions of people back, not to childhood since that would deplete the population of adults, but just a few years. I intend refining the subliminal triggers, to fuzz the part of the memory which deals with expectation. A female subject who finds male dresses and lingerie in her wardrobe, will suffer only a vague twinge of concern, shrug her shoulders and put them on. Likewise, the man who finds a shirt, suit and tie at the bottom of his bed will be puzzled for a moment by some obscure disquiet in his breast, but soon dismiss it. There will be, of course, those who remain with the same garments they took off the night before. In both cases there will be little expectation of others. What the hell will happen to all the other sex roles, at home or at work, is anybody's guess. Dammit, I haven't got all the answers. This is the first time it's been done on such a large scale.

If my suspicions are confirmed the result will be a carnival. I'll confuse the roles so much that it won't be a case of socialization according to sex, but according to individuals. In other words, wearing certain clothes, playing certain sports, following certain careers, all those sorts of things, will be as personal as whether one takes coffee with sugar, or tea without, and all the other combinations in between. What it will do to the history of the world is anybody's guess. Maybe it will be a wonderful chaos. My own belief is that men and women will share heroic figures between them. There will be women artists as great as Raphael was in my first history; there will be men explorers as great as Marcia Polo is in the present history. Gender will not bury greatness, or have prevented it from flourishing. Only such things as talent, fortitude, determination, diligence, stamina, courage – the list is long, but these attributes will determine greatness. Whether it is a man or a woman who carries them within, will not matter. There will still be those who do great things but remain unrecognized of course (me, for one) but it will be due to factors other than sex.

I've got to get into that laboratory. The interview for North East Polytechnic entrants is next Tuesday. I notice from the pamphlet that *all* the interviewers for the engineering course are females (what else!) and I intend to present a suitable image, while at the same time using a little male charm. A grey two-piece pinstripe, I think, with a cream blouse and string tie. I'll wear the skirt above the knee, so that the nylons show my legs to their best advantage. Black leather shoes, with short heels... I'll do that *accidental* little trip as I walk into the room, that always gets them halfway out of their seats. It has them feeling slightly protective towards me, but as long as I don't *fall* over completely, I won't be dismissed as just another silly male. Not too much make-up, but enough to put aside any thoughts that I might be butch. I should listen attentively, ask sensible questions, but not appear to be as clever as most women. I must be acceptable, but not dangerous. I must make them believe that having a nominal man on the course will remain an exception, all down to their personal feminine magnanimity. Finally I'll make some vague promises with my body language which are open to interpretation. I mean, if you've got it, why not use it?

Primal Hooting

Thomas M. Disch

Whitley is back! Those who treasure the more exotic forms of untruth will need no further prompting. *Communion*, Whitley Strieber's 1987 account of his abduction by aliens, was a primal hoot. Its sequel, *Transformation*, recycles the same whoppers with only minor variations, but it offers generous portions of the same shameless charlatany and page after page of Whitley's patented prose with its peanut-butter-and-jelly mix of penny-dreadful horror and saccharine sanctimony. Here's a taste of the peanut butter:

Andrew [his 7-year-old son and co-abductee] started screaming. The shock that went through me this time was absolutely explosive.... His screaming filled my ears, my soul. Listening to it, I wanted to die.... I thought I was going to suffocate. My throat was closed, my eyes were swimming with tears. The sense of being injured was powerful and awful. It was as if the whole house were full of filthy, stinking insects the size of tigers.

And here's the jelly:

The visitors are sweeping up from where we buried them under layers of denial and false assurance to deliver what is truly a message from the beyond.... They have caused me to slough off my old view of the world like the discolored skin that it was and seek a completely new vision of this magnificent, mysterious, and fiercely alive universe.

U.F.O. stories are generally not accorded serious media attention, but Strieber was a special case. He had already published best-selling horror novels that had gone on to become movies. Here was a bankable Name Writer willing to go on record as a U.F.O. abductee. "It's rather doubtful that a non-writer could spark the kind of enthusiasm that you find in this book," his editor at Morrow, James Landis, confided in the August 14, 1987, *Publisher's Weekly*. Whitley got a million-dollar advance for *Communion*. Morrow and Avon aren't ballyhoosing what they're paying for the sequel, for such publicity might confirm doubts among those inclined

to believe that Whitley's motivation is mercenary rather than his declared desire to seek a completely new vision of our mysterious universe. Surely it is hard to account for Whitley's and his publisher's conduct on any other basis. Read as a factual account of alien contact, *Communion* and *Transformation* have the verisimilitude of a Paul Bunyan legend. Taken as a strategy for commercial and psychological self-aggrandizement, however, they make perfect sense.

Consider only the internal chronology and publishing history of the two books. *Communion* tells of Whitley's encounters with the aliens on October 4 and December 26, 1985, events the aliens made him forget until the memories were retrieved via hypnosis in March of 1986. Between March and the fall of that year, Whitley must have made and sold the book proposal and written the book, which appeared in bookstores promptly in January 1987. Meanwhile, on April 2, 1986, Whitley now reports in *Transformation*, his 7-year-old son, Andrew, underwent his own U.F.O. abduction, which was the source of the paternal anguish quoted above. Readers of *Transformation* won't learn much about little Andrew's sufferings at the hands of the aliens, since Whitley is extremely respectful of his son's privacy in this matter. For the inside story on that one, we'll probably have to wait another couple of years until Andrew is old enough to appear on talk shows to sell his own searing account. Does it not seem strange that Whitley would not have mentioned these latest tricks his aliens were up to in the book he was then writing? This is a question not addressed in *Transformation*, but I can hypothesize two answers: (1) Andrew's abduction was held in reserve for *Transformation* because of its can-you-top-this, sequel-making value; or (2) Whitley did not want to expose his boy to the merciless scrutiny of the press at that time, but then, coming to realize the awesome significance of his revelations, decided that he would sacrifice these paternal scruples in the interest of the Truth.

Transformation differs from *Communion* in several significant ways. Whitley no longer accesses his abduction memories via hypnosis.

Indeed, he is now critical of the practice and of his fellow U.F.O. expert Budd Hopkins, whose competing and more lurid account of abduction—and rape—by aliens, *Intruders* (Random House, no less), appeared in bookstores shortly after *Communion*. "I feel," Whitley warns, "that the present fad of hypnotizing 'abductees,' which is being engaged in by untrained investigators, will inevitably lead to suffering, breakdown, and possibly even suicide." Hopkins's book reported that women were being impregnated by aliens, returned to Earth, and then re-abducted for the harvesting of the fetuses, and while Whitley wisely refrains from questioning the literal truth of such claims, he does take Hopkins to task for his view of the aliens as a destructive force:

I cannot agree with this. Certainly it is clear that our response to an encounter is often one of fear and terror. Our perceptions are distorted by ponc of the high level of strong-ness we observe.

But it is premature to assume that our experiences are actually negative in content.

Whitley is now promoting an upbeat U.F.O. abduction experience. Fear is to be a key that opens up a cosmic funhouse:

We must learn to walk the razor's edge between fear and ecstasy.... [The visitors] made me face death, face them, face my weaknesses and my buried terrors. At the same time, they kept demonstrating to me that I was more than a body, and even that my body could enter extraordinary states such as physical levitation.

In *Communion* Whitley had solicited readers to come to the front of the church and testify about their U.F.O. experiences, an invitation that yielded a brief fad of abductee support groups. In *Transformation* Whitley extends a more enticing possibility, a form of transcendence that doesn't depend on the whims of aliens, who are notoriously undependable, never appearing when they're invited. How about out-of-body travel? It's safe, it's cheap and it's semi-reliable, if, like

Whitley, one uses the methods developed at the Monroe Institute in West Virginia, where Whitley went to learn methods for entering a "mind awake/body asleep" state that allows the wakeful sleeper to shuffle off this mortal coil and visit friends in a disincorporate but not imperceptible condition. Two people Whitley tried to contact in this way didn't receive his vibrations, but then, in February of 1987, Eureka!

A friend in Denver called me to report an odd experience. She had awakened and seen the outline of my face across the room from her. Later she wrote me, "What I saw exactly was the impression of your face wearing the glasses you wear amid the leaves of a plant hanging near the door of my bedroom for about three seconds in the dark. I turned on the light and nothing was there."

I probably would not have mentioned the incident had it not kept happening.

Chicago radio personality Roy Leonard...awakened on the night of June 7, 1987, to find my presence in his bedroom. He reported that he could "almost" see me.

That night I had an extremely strange dream of moving like a ghost through an endless, dark woods and entering a little room that was so dark I couldn't see a thing. How Roy Leonard ended up on the receiving end of that dream I do not presently understand.

What Whitley's out-of-body capabilities have to do with his U.F.O. experiences is never precisely spelled out, but it makes good sense intuitively. To paraphrase Judy Garland, "If U.F.O.s fly beyond the rainbow, why, then, oh why can't I?" In any case, there is no need to speculate about Whitley's intentions and supernal powers, for I have been able to discuss all these matters in confidence with Whitley's disembodied spirit! Only last night—October 13, 1988—Whitley's ectoplasmic, night-wandering self visited me in my bedroom, and this time it was no mere three-second, now-you-see-him-now-you-don't fugitive vision. His pale, tormented visage hung around for several minutes, and though I lacked the presence of mind to tape-record our dialogue, you can take my word for it that what follows is substantially what Whitley confided to me. Whitley himself may not recall our conversation, just as he seems to have forgotten his visit to Roy Leonard; he may even deny that it took place, but I am entirely persuaded it was Whitley I spoke to and no one else, though a sceptical friend has suggested

to me that what I perceived as Whitley was only a product of my own overheated imagination. Or then again, it may be, as Hamlet surmised:

The spirit that I have seen
May be a devil; and the devil hath
power
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and
perhaps
Out of my weakness and my
melancholy—
As he is very potent with such
spirits—
Abuses me to damn me.

I had just laid aside the volume of Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* with which I had been beguiling the sleepless hours when I began to feel a curious sensation, not unlike the one recounted by Whitley: "It felt as if I had come unstuck from myself. The experience was strange in the extreme—almost beyond description." At the same time I heard an unearthly mewling sound that seemed to come from outside the window screen. It was inconceivable that a cat could have made its way to my window ledge, eleven stories above ground level, for there is no fire escape, and yet I could distinctly see a dark shape on the ledge—a shape that, even as I watched, dumb with horror, proceeded to drift through the screen and to hover above a spider plant in the far corner of the room. Slowly the dark cloud coalesced into the mirthless face I had seen on so many television talk shows.

"Whitley!" I gasped. "Is it possible?" His face trembled as though moulded of colourless Jell-O and solidified into a sneer. "Of course not. You must be one of those fantasy-prone personalities I've read about. You must be having a hypnopompic hallucination."

Whitley was undoubtedly referring to Robert A. Baker's discussion of *Communion*, which had appeared in the Winter 1987-88 issue of *The Skeptical Inquirer*, a journal put out by CSI-COP, the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal, an organization devoted to the thankless task of debunking all the varieties of supernatural and pseudoscientific fraud. According to Baker, Whitley's U.F.O. stories are textbook cases of hypnopompic hallucination.

complete with the awakening from a sound sleep, the strong sense of reality and of being awake, the paralysis (due to the fact that the body's neural circuits keep our muscles relaxed and help preserve our sleep), and the encounter with strange beings. Following the encounter, instead of jumping out of bed and going in search of the strangers he has seen, Strieber typically goes back to sleep. [All these patterns

are repeated in *Transformation*.—T.D.J.]...Strieber, of course, is convinced of the reality of these experiences. This too is expected. If he was not...then the experiences would not be hypnopompic or hallucinatory.

Until this moment I had been sceptical about Baker's theory, which seems designed to give Whitley and other self-styled abductees the benefit of the doubt with regard to their good faith. The internal evidence of *Communion* suggests to me that even if Whitley's aliens had their origins in his waking dreams, they have long since been assimilated into a wholly conscious hoax. Whitley can bring passionate conviction to the defence of his lies; he even boasts of how he breezes through lie detector tests [while enjoining "debunkers" intent on twisting the facts" from contacting his front man, Dr John Gleidman]. But liars characteristically evidence a passionate commitment to their lies. Witness such recent bearers of false witness as Oliver North, Kurt Waldheim, President Reagan and Jim and Tammy Bakker. The list could be continued for many column inches. The 1980s are the Age of Isuzu. Lying has become a form of entertainment. Surely a large part of Whitley's readership approaches his books in a spirit of connoisseurship rather than credulity, relishing the spectacle of his effrontery as one might the penitential tears of Jimmy Swagart.

But there is no need for me to frame an indictment against Whitley. He did so himself with unforgettable (and uncharacteristic) eloquence on the night of October 13.

"Must you come visiting me in my dreams?" I grumbled at the phantasm of Whitley. "Why can't we just declare a truce?"

"You started this, Disch," he hissed. "No other respectable writer thought it worth his while to attack a book about U.F.O.s. There's a gentleman's agreement in the book trade that crackpot ideas are not discussed in highbrow journals."

"Right. Only on *The Tonight Show*, and then only if there's no one there to contradict you."

The disembodied head nodded. "Exactly. I am in the business of founding a new faith, and faiths are, by definition, beyond criticism. It's quite simple, really. In a world of systemic corruption, we must all look the other way. If every Watergate conspirator had had the reticence and decency of G. Gordon Liddy, children might still have some respect for constituted authority."

"Oh, Liddy had great team spirit, I'll give you that. The thing is, Whitley, I'm not on your team."

"That makes no difference when religion is at issue. Meeting a Mormon socially, you would not cross-examine him about his honest opinion of the revelations Joseph Smith received from the Angel Moroni. And I claim the same exemption from criticism. As I see it, there's not much difference between the books I've written and the synoptic Gospels, all I am saying is that I saw what I saw. Impeach my honesty and that of those who have colluded in one or another of my fancies, and you impeach the honesty of all true believers, and so my first priority is to take the moral high ground, along with the author of Proverbs, who wrote, 'Smite a scorners, and the simple will beware.' Or, a verse I like even better, 'Judgements are prepared for scorners, and stripes for the backs of fools.'"

This had the ring of the Whitley house first, fictional exploration of ufology, a short story called "Pain," had taken the form of soft-core S&M porn; the Whitley who witnesses, in Transformation, the following cautionary tableau:

a stone floor with a low stone table in the middle of it. The table was a bit more than waist high, and on it there was a set of iron shackles. A man was led down some steps and attached to these shackles. He was right in front of my face, not two feet from me, looking directly at me with eyes so sad that I almost couldn't bear it....Behind him was a taller person wearing black....The next thing I knew this person was beating the poor man with a terrible whip. Before my eyes this man was being almost torn to pieces by the fury of the beating....Somebody behind me said, "He failed to get you to obey him and now he must bear the consequences."

"There's one thing I still don't understand," I confided to Whitley's head. "I can see your incentive to pile it on. You earn a fortune, and it makes you a kind of celebrity, and there must even be a kind of high-wire thrill to see how far you can go with it. But what's in it for the other Johnny-come-lately abductees? They won't have best sellers or movie sales; they won't be interviewed by talk show hosts."

"Ah, but as Jesus said at some point, every little bit counts. Bruce Lee, for instance. His testimony wasn't required of him. He isn't even my editor at Morrow. He simply saw there was an opportunity to do something for his employers, and for me, and pitched in. Talk about team players!"

Whitley was referring to one of the drollest tales in his book, concerning the night that Bruce Lee, a senior editor at Morrow, visited a bookstore on Manhattan's Upper East Side on an evening in January 1987 and witnessed two

aliens in winter coats, their faces muffled with scarves. The aliens were paging through the newly released Communion, "turning - and apparently speed-reading - the pages at a remarkable rate." Mr Lee noticed that "behind their dark glasses both the man and the woman had large, black, almond-shaped eyes." Lee, a former reporter and correspondent for Newsweek and Reader's Digest, "felt decidedly uneasy, deeply shocked." Later, Lee would take a lie detector test administered by Whitley's own polygraphist, Nat Laurendi, and when asked if he thought the beings he saw in the bookstore were aliens - or, as Whitley prefers, "visitors" - Lee replied yes. Then: "He was asked if I had offered him anything of value to tell his story. He answered 'no' and this answer was evaluated as true."

"Yes," Whitley went on, "Bruce is a peach. But really, everyone at Morrow has been wonderful. Sherry Arden, who is the president and publisher, has been quoted in Publisher's Weekly as saying, 'We truly believe this happened to Whitley.' And Rena Volner at Avon called me 'one of the most creative people I know.' And then there's Phillipe Mora, who'll be directing the movie of Communion: He came out to the cottage and met one of the aliens...Oops, excuse me, visitors, right there where it all began."

"But none of them are exactly disinterested witnesses, are they? I'm surprised that everyone at Morrow isn't required to declare their belief in U.F.O.s as a condition of continued employment. The people I can't understand are the people who imitate you for no obvious mercenary reason."

"Every abductee, within the smaller public sphere of his or her own social circle, is a mini-celebrity, a person important enough to have been taken up into the high-tech heaven of a genuine flying saucer. That should be inducement enough for millions of people - once I've got this thing rolling."

"Even though everyone knows they're bull-shitting?"

"And who isn't these days? Why should the right to lie and be respected for one's lies be reserved for televangelists and the highest officials of our government? Indeed, in that regard the situation nowadays is strikingly close to that of the Roman Empire in the early Christian era, when the Emperors were officially divine. Caligula claimed to have enjoyed sexual congress with the moon-goddess in a manner not unlike my own spicier moments aboard the U.F.O.s. What could have been more personally satisfying for an ordinary Roman citizen, confronted with such poppycock, than to declare an equivalent demi-divinity? - If not Godhead, at least co-immortality with the crucified and

resurrected God. So much for the divine pretensions of Caligula, or Pat Robertson, or Nero, or Nixon, or Heliogabalus."

"Whitley, are you trying to suggest that your potboilers are on a par with the Gospels?"

Whitley smiled a sly smile. "Did I say that? No, no, you're putting words in my mouth."

Before I could ask him any more questions, Whitley laid a pseudopod aside of his nose, and, with a wink, he disappeared. But I fully expect he will return, in a year or so, with new spiritual revelations from his hand-puppet aliens.

The above piece, which is a sequel to Disch's "The Village Alien" (IZ 25), first appeared in the American magazine The Nation (November 14th 1988), and it is reprinted here by kind permission of the author. Whitley Strieber's Transformation: The Breakthrough was published in the USA by William Morrow, and in the UK by Century Hutchinson (£10.95).

Mutant Popcorn

Continued from page 26

getting cast. The script has a nostalgic flavour of having been dashed off in a single draft over a wet weekend, and the set pieces are managed with suitably lurid gusto.

Lair of the White Worm's a modest, certainly a slapdash, entertainment, but hard to loathe. By contrast, I watched Lair back-to-back with a second new Brit shocker, a wholly tedious Jekyll/Hyde remake called Edge of Sanity that dumps Tony Perkins and Glynis Barber into a cynical if belated exploitation of Ripper nostalgia. Lacking all the wit and humanity of the Hammer classic Dr Jekyll and Sister Hyde, it exchanges everything of value in our native fantasy film heritage for the sadistic exposure and mutilation of a series of actresses in anachronistic fetish makeup and underwear. Like Lair, it's a calculated shot at emulating the grand tradition of British horror twenty years on; like Slipstream, I'm astonished and mortified it could get made at all. Stick with the Russell, and go see Münchhausen or Paperhouse if you're seriously hot for the best of British. Just keep this puddle of spew at a savoury distance.

(Nick Lowe)

Andrew Ferguson Green-Eyed Monstera

It was the rude messages on the computer that first made her suspicious. That and the marketing drive that kept him away from home two nights in every five.

The robot cleaner had woken her that morning as every morning, whirring through the bedroom door with a duster. She watched it at work, a squat metal figure moving quietly around the curtained room. It skirted the philodendrons beside the window, spraying them with a fine mist.

"...Darlin'?" Peter was surfacing slowly.

"What is it?"

"What time is it?"

"Quarter to eight. Are you coming back tonight?"

"Yeah." He was out of bed quickly, foraging his clothes from the chair. "The sales conference is in Edinburgh, so I'll be back about seven."

He moved through to the kitchen and she heard him key the password into the house computer and laugh.

"Anne... Come and see what Foster's hacked in today. I'm going to have to speak to that boy, seriously; it's not good enough, really."

She took her time going through, getting dressed first. But he was still grinning when she appeared in the doorway.

"I'm really going to have to speak to him," he repeated, pointing at the screen.

COULD THE FATHER-IN-LAW USE SOME MOTHER-IN-LAW'S TONGUE?

DOES HE HAVE A RED-HOT POKER?

BUSY LIZZIE'S BUSH NEEDS FERTILIZING...

BUT DON'T THINK YOU'LL FIND A MAIDEN HAIR...

Anne stopped reading in disgust. "Hasn't he got something better to do with his time than hack into someone else's computer?"

Peter looked sheepish. "He's down the Haymarket most nights, drinking his salary. I suppose it seems funny at the time."

He prodded the keyboard again, removing Foster's message and bringing up road and weather reports; his project reminders from the previous day and a message from one of his other colleagues, legitimately entered this time, to remind him of a lunch date for the next week. She watched him hunched over the computer, remembering his former handlessness with all things mechanical. They had certainly trained him out of that, she thought.

"What about this weekend?"

"Oh, I forgot to tell you - we'll be down in Bristol

Saturday and Sunday. Pre-re-training briefing or something. I won't be back till early Monday morning." Peter queried the time the computer was taking to boil his egg, but the screen told him it would be another minute. He pulled his jacket on, squinting out of the window at the morning frost.

"Is Candida going today?"

"No. She's got another course on at Perth this afternoon. Why?" he said, looking puzzled.

"Oh, just wondered, that's all." Was his look genuine or did he know she suspected?

Peter turned away to the door, rumpling his hair into position in the hallway mirror. "I'd better be off, darling. Start the car for me, will you? See you around seven."

When she had keyed the instructions into the computer to start the car, she went to the window and watched him lope out of sight, the smart salesman's suit sitting uneasily on his big-boned frame. The egg slowly boiled solid.

In the garage, the car was purring in the open doorway; its reflective paint glinting in the half-dark.

"Morning, Freddie," he said, climbing in. "Freddie the Ford" had been her idea.

"Good morning, Peter," the on-board computer replied, reading his voice-print. "Please program itinerary details for ETA analysis."

All this just to get to Edinburgh, Peter thought. He touched one of the pre-set destination buttons. The car slid out onto the main road as he half-listened to the travel information and advice pouring forth. Much as he disliked machines, at least the computer talked to him these days, he thought; Anne's silences lengthened and deepened with each new business trip. If only she understood...

It was not until mid-morning that Anne found herself dialling the familiar number.

"Good morning. Thank you for calling Green Fingers International." The flat Fife voice had little real gratitude for the caller.

"Is Mr McGuinness there?" Anne kept her voice as neutral as possible although it was unlikely that the receptionist would remember her from her one visit to the office.

"No... no. I think he's at a sales conference in Edinburgh today. Can anyone else help?"

"Is his secretary in?"

"Just a moment and I'll check... No, Candida's out as well, I'm afraid. I think she's with him."

"Thanks. 'Bye." She put the phone down quickly, half ashamed. Of course the receptionist could be wrong; she had phoned the office before and they had had no idea where Peter was. But...

But, she thought, as she looked round the living room, things might have been different if she had stayed on working. The regular demands of her own job might have left her with a sense of belonging; she might have felt like a human being in her own right, instead of hanging on his every return home and feeling his silences and her suspicions growing between them like a thick wall of poison ivy.

But she had to find out, she told herself, and went to the cupboard where she had hidden the equipment after she had got back yesterday. The morning messages on the computer had come from another man, she knew, but their schoolboy humour implied complicity. She often tortured herself with pictures of Foster and Peter swapping stories of their conquests in some hotel lounge bar, while the petite Candida waited upstairs, applying the finishing touches to that perfect make-up. Or did she wear her make-up in bed? Anne could never decide.

She slipped the cassette into the machine to get the assembly instructions for the equipment, unravelling the wires meantime.

"Hi there and thank you for buying our product," said an American voice. "The Plant Philanderer is the first device of its kind: a remarkable innovation which allows you to trace the emotions of your loved one even though he or she is hundreds or even thousands of miles away.

"It was a man named Sauvin who first discovered that plants responded to the pleasures - and pains - of their owners. Simply by attaching electrodes to the leaves of a house plant, he was able to demonstrate its reactions to the experiences he was undergoing by means of tracings on a graph. Strong emotions produced marked peaks on the graph."

Anne cast around the room for a suitable subject. How appropriate, she thought to herself, that a house-plant salesman should be tracked in this way. Peter had always had green fingers and the whole house was a busman's holiday of greenery.

"Sauvin experimented first with the device by giving himself small electric shocks," the voice on the cassette went on. "The plant responded by producing corresponding peaks on the graph paper. But he quickly tired of this painful exercise and decided on a more daring experiment. He left the apparatus switched on while he holidayed with his girlfriend hundreds of miles away; and, on his return, he found that the plant had produced peaks on the graph that corresponded exactly in time to when he and his girlfriend were making love.

Vindictively, Anne clamped the electrodes to one of his favourites, a huge *Monstera Deliciosa* in the corner. It was a fine specimen of the handsome Swiss Cheese Plant; great, heart-shaped leaves with slashes and holes in them that increased in number with each new leaf which burst from the bulging spine of its predecessor.

"Watch the unique Plant Philanderer tracing instrument produce a carbon copy of your absent partner's emotions," the voice on the tape concluded jokily, "and quiz them when they get home about the mean-

ing of those peaks!"

But Anne spent most of the day avoiding the equipment like a guilty secret, attending to whatever the robot and the house computer had left undone. She studied herself in the mirror for long minutes, searching for the change of hairstyle or clothes she told herself she needed.

It was only by chance that she happened to be coming back from the kitchen at four o'clock when the tracer went wild, scrawling a jagged line upwards until it went off the top of the graph paper and peaked with a flourish on the wallpaper.

"What time is it, Freddie?" Peter climbed behind the wheel and threw his briefcase on to the back seat.

"In 14 seconds it will be 3.00 p.m. Please program itinerary details for ETA analysis."

"Oh, Kinross, I suppose," said Peter, and pushed the pre-set button for Candida's flat. Not for the first time recently he had enjoyed being away from her all day; he was glad that he had organized the course for her in Perth.

"Traffic intermediate on north exits from Edinburgh," Freddie chirped. "Take George Street/Charlotte Square route for optimum efficiency."

But maybe today was not a day for optimum efficiency, Peter decided; he allowed the car to drift into the right-hand lane at the lights, turning down Dundas Street as they changed.

"Wrong turning. Wrong turning. Wrong turning. Please re-enter to obtain corrective route. ETA reversal: add five minutes seven seconds to previous estimate. Please re-enter."

Peter pushed the voice button to "off" and braked at the next set of lights. His thoughts no longer needed a computer to interrupt them; looking up, his eye caught the second floor flat at the corner of Heriot Row where Anne had stayed during their college days. He turned right at the next corner and then left, following his own route.

Half an hour later, he had meandered right through the New Town and turned the car out of the back streets into the main flow of traffic heading out on Queensferry Road. His mind was made up now, and as he accelerated past Cramond Brig the decision seemed clear and right.

Candida was only a physical relationship to him, he had come to realize; part and parcel of the salesman's lifestyle he had never really enjoyed. It was expected of you that you went on long business trips, got drunk with other salesmen, and slept with your secretary; it was the unwritten code in the company, a sort of secret sister-and-brotherhood that tightened its corporate grip on you every time you bought another round on expenses, squeezing out your life outside working hours until all leisure time was spent playing the company's game.

But now he had had enough, he thought, putting his foot to the floor as he sped past massive container vehicles cruising on automatic pilot on the inside lane. He would make a new start with Anne, setting up their own business somewhere, a small business that would involve him in getting his hands dirty with the growing things that had fired his enthusiasm in the first place, selling houseplants to real people

instead of supermarket chains and office designers. A real business run by the two of them together. Perhaps then he and Anne would be as they once were.

Satisfied with that thought, he relented and put Freddie's voice back on, letting the computer guide him through the traffic, estimating the speed of the other vehicles and indicating when he should overtake, guiding him to his destination.

Lost in his own thoughts and plans, he remembered only when he was in the outskirts of Kinross. "Damn! I forgot you were taking me to Candida's, Freddie. Well, there's a change of plan - give me an ETA for home base."

Scarcely had the computer estimated the journey time when Peter switched the voice button off again, ignoring the weather report preview. The tyres squealed as he turned right down the country road for Glenrothes, shifting into top gear as the rev counter climbed. It was as he was considering stopping for flowers that it happened.

Just outside Kinross on the B road to Glenrothes, there is a tight left-hand bend bounded by a stone wall. It is not an impossible corner but it requires care; more care than Peter gave it that day on an

afternoon when the frost had come down early. The Ford slid through a sheen of black ice at eighty, crumpling through the stonework of the wall before it ploughed into the trees beyond and lay still. It was ten minutes before the next motorist to pass found him.

Back in the room, Anne watched the tracing instrument make on last wild flourish and then suddenly plunge. She smiled grimly. "I suppose that means you're on the way home, dear. Well, at least I know now for sure."

Then she turned back to the computer and continued scrolling through the Yellow Page directory. Language laboratories... Lavatory brushes... Lawyers.

Andrew Ferguson is 26 years old and works as a solicitor in St Andrews, Scotland. "Green-Eyed Monster" was, in an earlier form, one of the runners-up in an *Albacon/Glasgow Herald* sf short-story competition. "Apart from a few bits and pieces in the schools' section of a local poetry magazine, it's the first work I've had published," he says. He also adds that it's based on actual research described in the book *The Secret Life of Plants* by Peter Tompkins and Christopher Bird.

COMMENT

The Vanishing Midlist Charles Platt

Times are getting hard for American science-fiction writers. Some of them now make less money selling their work in America than they do in Europe. Some of them can't sell their work in America at all.

Norman Spinrad recently took up residence in Paris, proclaiming loudly that Europe was more culturally and technologically progressive than the United States. Spinrad's love-affair with the French might have something to do with their affection for him: his books have done adequately in the United States, but far better in France.

For some other writers the contrast is more acute. John Sladek now finds it almost impossible to be published in America, yet his work still has a receptive audience in Britain. Thomas M. Disch has given up writing science fiction novels, and now writes little fiction of any kind, mainly because of disillusionment with American publishing. A.A. Attanasio and A.E. van Vogt are both best-sellers on the continent; both have experienced reversals in the United States. I myself feel I have

been better published in Britain than in America. John Shirley, one of the so-called cyberpunks, has been unable to find a U.S. paperback publisher for his most recent novel. And so it goes on.

These seemingly isolated incidents are all manifestations of one unpleasant fact: in America, we're seeing the decline of the midlist. And since science fiction has traditionally been a midlist commodity, our literature is in serious trouble.

"Midlist" means the middle range of a publisher's list of books. The ones at the top of the list are the best-sellers, heavily promoted, selling 100,000 copies or more. At the bottom are westerns, cheap romances, and other types of formula-fiction mass-produced with minimal expectations. Somewhere in the middle are reasonably thoughtful novels for reasonably thoughtful readers - the literary equivalent of BBC2 television.

Science fiction has grown so much in the past twenty years, it now spans all levels of publishing. At the top are

a few best-selling authors such as Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, Douglas Adams and Piers Anthony. At the bottom are people who concoct simplistic adventures for teenagers (tact inhibits me from naming names). But the most interesting science fiction tends not to exist at either of these extremes. It's too adult or complex to be sold as downmarket trash, too non-conformist to make it as bestseller material. It is, therefore, an inescapably midlist commodity.

In the 1960s, American midlist science-fiction novels usually sold between 20,000 and 40,000 copies in paperback. Today, it's a different story. Most U.S. publishers are reluctant to talk much about their net sales figures (possibly because the news is too depressing), but my guess is that they typically print around 30,000 copies, of which perhaps 15,000 are actually sold to consumers. The rest are "stripped" - that is, the retailer strips the cover off the unsold book, throws the book away, and returns the cover to the publisher for credit.

How did this sad state of affairs occur? Oddly enough, it started when science fiction became too successful for its own good.

Twenty years ago, before *Star Wars*, *Close Encounters* and *E.T.* made our field bland, romanticized, and dumb enough for the masses, science fiction was still a minority taste. If you admitted that you wrote it, people thought you were bizarre. There was shame attached to the profession, and very little money to be made.

Consequently, the only people who wrote science fiction seriously were those who felt totally dedicated to it. Their prose might not be elegant, but they made up for that with their concepts and their sense of conviction. They turned out a fairly small number of books (in today's terms) for a relatively small and reasonably literate audience. Alfred Bester once remarked that he earned much more money when he wrote for television, but science fiction was the only field that allowed him to write without making compromises. The audience was smart enough to meet him half-way.

Then some cultural changes occurred (as I described in my column in the issue before last) and the general public became more receptive to "far out" ideas. Book publishers gradually realized that fantasy-flavored science fiction could fill this need. The question was, how to develop the product and exploit the market before one's competitors got there first.

Picture, if you will, Hiram Schwartz, president of Piranha Books on New York's Madison Avenue, opening his copy of *Publisher's Weekly* one day in 1969. He reads, with growing irritation, that *Stranger in a Strange Land* has moved from being an underground cult novel to a true bestseller.

Hiram takes a meeting with his editors. "We ought to publish some of this science-fiction stuff," he opines. "College students are going ape over it. Who do we have in-house who understands it?"

The editors look at each other uneasily. "Well, there's that funny-looking clerk with the beard and the glasses, in the mail room," one of them ventures. "He's always reading trashy science-fiction magazines."

"Okay, we'll give him a shot at it. Tell him to find us some science fiction. But don't give him an expense account, and don't let him pay more than \$1,500 per book."

Thus it is that a new editor is appointed, and a science-fiction program is born.

I know of at least two cases where something like this actually happened. I also know of cases where they couldn't find an expert (even in the mail room) so they gave the job to an existing editor who had no knowledge

of science fiction at all.

Within a few years, the output of American science fiction doubled, and most of the stigma attached to the field disappeared. More people were reading it than ever before, and some of the authors started making decent money. But there was a price to be paid for this seeming windfall.

For years, science-fiction editors hadn't had to worry much about commercial considerations, because science fiction never sold particularly well. By the mid-1970s, this was no longer true. The U.S. publishing industry was becoming more bestseller-minded generally, as small companies were bought by mass-entertainment conglomerates. And science fiction was now potentially big business. "Why haven't we got a writer who does as well as Heinlein?" was the reproach an editor began to fear - implicitly or explicitly - in every sales meeting.

The result was inevitable. As the emphasis shifted from the quality of the work to the quantity of copies sold, science fiction became a simplified mass-market commodity. In their attempts to exploit it, publishers swamped it with mediocre books.

We've gone through several business cycles since then, but we're still swamped with product, because the expectations are higher than ever. After all, *E.T.* was the most profitable movie ever made, and Isaac Asimov did finally make it to number one on the *New York Times* bestseller list. Consequently, the current glut is the worst ever. This is why midlist titles now sell so badly: most of them aren't very good, and there are too many of them chasing too few readers.

Some sort of cutback now seems inevitable. Tor Books has already reduced its prodigious output. Others may soon follow suit. Some editors talk grimly about dumping any midlist writer who has a really poor sales record. Greg Bear, one-time president of Science Fiction Writers of America and a successful author in his own right, warned his contemporaries a year ago that the midlist might disappear altogether in the coming decade leaving nothing between bestsellers and low-end trash-adventures.

Sadly, ironically, the science fiction that we used to like best is the kind that is now suffering most: books that are too intelligent, too nonconformist, or too adult to be merchandized for the American masses. I doubt whether Alfred Bester could still write science fiction without making compromises, as he once did. And if a truly idiosyncratic author such as Philip K. Dick entered the field today, I'm not sure that he could get his work published at all. There may be readers out there who still want to buy novels like that; but those readers are now a small, elite minority in the mass audience, and

editors don't know how to reach them.

To exacerbate the problem, two giant chains of bookstores now wield immense power. When a publisher solicits orders from them for a new book, the chain's buyer checks computerized sales figures to see whether the author's previous work sold satisfactorily. The lesson is brutally simple: if a writer produces a book that doesn't do well, its failure may jeopardize his future sales. Consequently, writers are becoming less willing to take risks. They're more motivated to stick with a successful formula than try something new.

But there's worse to come. An editor told me last year that for the first time, a buyer from a retail chain wanted to know who edited each book in the publisher's list. Apparently, the buyer was trying to establish whether some editors tend to pick better-selling books than others. This means, of course, that editors must now feel the same pressure as writers to play safe, commercially. They'll publish sequels to big names rather than ground-breaking work by newcomers.

And if they can't afford big names, they'll find some cheap and sleazy substitute. They'll use bribery and flattery to persuade a famous author to allow other people to write books sharing a scenario that he created in one of his early works. The famous author is paid purely for the use of his name, which goes in giant type at the top of the cover. The relatively unknown author, who actually writes the book, receives a pittance and sees his name in minuscule print at the bottom of the cover. A flagrant example of this practice is Isaac Asimov's *Robot City* series, master-minded by New York's genius of exploitation, Byron Preiss.

When this kind of practice first started, there was some stigma attached to it. But I myself have written a couple of books set in Piers Anthony's "Chthon universe." Robert Silverberg has a deal with Bantam Books to expand three Asimov novels to novel length (with some participation from Asimov himself) for more than a million dollars. And Gregory Benford recently obtained permission from Arthur C. Clarke to write a sequel to Clarke's first novel, *Against the Fall of Night*. Ace Books is paying \$300,000 for this project: half to Benford, half to Clarke (whose original story will be republished in the new book).

Where else have we seen this kind of deal? Why, in Hollywood. Almost any successful genre movie now spawns endless sequels, written and directed by people who had no connection with the original film. And Hollywood is also well acquainted with the power of famous names to

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Brian Stableford

The Magic Bullet

Lisa had never before had such a strange feeling when going out on a case. She hadn't expected to be called out on any more cases. She was due for retirement in a matter of weeks, having nearly reached her sixtieth birthday, and had been desk-anchored for the best part of two years.

This wasn't exactly a case, though. The call she'd received hadn't made her position entirely clear, but she was not to be part of the forensic team examining the scene. She would be, in essence, an advisor – perhaps best described as an expert witness. She had special knowledge of both the place and the victim. She had been a student in the Applied Genetics Department herself, nearly forty years before, and she'd visited it many times since for purely social reasons. She knew Morgan Miller as well as anyone did, though that wasn't saying a great deal.

Had it just been a police matter the invitation would have been couched in more respectful terms, but it wasn't. Although Miller hadn't been working directly for the Ministry of Defence, any attempt to sabotage research in genetic engineering was construed as a hazard to National Security. Men from the Ministry would be in control, and they would want to question her.

She wasn't looking forward to discussing her relationship with Morgan Miller – it had been part of her private life for far too long, and had never before touched her work as a police scientist.

They hadn't told her over the phone whether anything had happened to Miller – they'd said that they were still trying to make contact with him. She inferred, though, that something had. Whatever the true extent of this affair turned out to be, it surely wouldn't stop with arsonous assault on Morgan Miller's mice.

When she thought of it like that, it seemed simply absurd; firebombing a thousand mice was one of the most ridiculous crimes imaginable. The apparent stupidity of it, though, was sinister. Miller's mice had been breeding away, generation after generation, for nearly four decades, undisturbed and unconsidered by anyone else except Miller himself. Now, it seemed, they had become important enough to be worth destroying. Lisa found that thought profoundly disturbing. It suggested that Morgan Miller had been keeping secrets from her.

One secret, anyhow.

She didn't like that idea. It hurt her pride. It might also make her look stupid to the Men from the Ministry, which was bad from a personal point of view, and bad because of her position in the police force. It was

little consolation to know that Morgan Miller had always been, by nature, a very secretive man – a man who liked to be a law unto himself.

The scene, when she got there, was chaotic. The fire was out, but the firemen were still wandering around, and the mess they had made was awful. There was wreckage everywhere, and stinking foam soaked the walls and the floor. The forensic team had already moved in, and they acknowledged her arrival with embarrassed nods of recognition. The only other familiar face was the caretaker, Tommy, who had been in the job for twenty years, and knew her as an occasional caller. Now, she obviously seemed to him a sympathetic figure – a possible ally against the uniformed officers and the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. The mournful look he gave her was a faint but heart-rending echo of her own feelings.

"Hell, Miss Friemann," he said, desolately. "That's his whole damn life. What in the world is he going to do?"

He always called her "Miss," never "Doctor" (let alone "Superintendent," which was her theoretical rank as a senior police scientist). She didn't mind in the least – she felt that she was a partner in the tragedy, not just a part of the bureaucracy of investigation.

Lisa looked around at the blasted cages: the smashed glass, the twisted wire, the shards of plastic: everything blackened, the odour of a thousand roasted mice mingling with the last traces of the acrid smoke and the vapour from the slimy foam.

"Did you try to call him?" asked Lisa. It was four in the morning, and Professor Miller ought to be tucked up safely in his lonely bed, though she was rather afraid that he wasn't.

"He doesn't answer his phone," said Tommy, sadly.

"Is he away?"

"Not that I know of," the old man replied, still shaking his head in disbelief. "Why, Miss...?"

"Who else did you try? Did you manage to contact Stella?" Stella Filisetti was Miller's latest research fellow. Lisa presumed that Miller had been conducting a desultory affair with her, in parallel with the desultory affair which he had been conducting with Lisa. It tended to be his habit. Lisa didn't mind – not in a strictly jealous fashion – but she couldn't help wondering whether Stella was in on the secret that had made Morgan Miller a target.

"I phoned her right after I called the fire brigade, but she didn't answer. I'm sorry, Miss – maybe I

should've called you, too, but I don't have your number. I didn't know at first it was a police matter. All I saw was the smoke. I phoned the brigade right away, then the Professor and Dr Filisetti. Then I came to see if there was anything to be done. Not a damn thing, Miss. Couldn't get past the door. Saw no one. Sorry."

The fire chief, who recognized Lisa from way back, came over to tell her that it had been a well-made bomb, with explosives as well as the incendiary material. Someone had certainly intended to make a mess. Lisa let him finish before telling him that she wasn't officially in charge. She would have liked to put some questions to the uniformed men, and to her own team, but had to be careful of protocol, and decided to wait for a more convenient moment.

The heavy mob arrived, in dark raincoats that were meant to be unobtrusive, but seemed as distinctive as any uniform. Lisa had some contact with the Ministry on a regular basis, but she didn't know these men, and didn't even know what cryptic initials would be used to identify their Department.

It was easy enough to work out why they'd involved themselves so quickly. When someone tried to destroy the work of an experimental scientist, the most likely reason was that he'd discovered something which it was to someone's advantage to know. Commercial advantage might be the relevant issue – commercial concerns had motivated many a firebomb in the past – but where genetic engineers were concerned, the Ministry was always anxious, always sensitive.

One man – a tall, dapper individual in his fifties – introduced himself to Lisa as Peter Smith. It had to be true; no one used Smith as a *nom de guerre* any more. It was utterly *passé*.

"We may have to warn your people off this one, Dr Friemann," said Smith. He was trying, but not too hard, to sound apologetic. "It could be our baby."

"Have you found Miller?" asked Lisa, not wanting to get involved in a discussion about jurisdiction.

"Not yet. Your people and mine have already gone to his home. I'm on the way there myself – I came here to collect you. We understand that you knew Professor Miller well and could tell us something about his work."

"Stella Filisetti could tell you more."

"We haven't been able to locate her yet."

Lisa took this to imply that Stella Filisetti was suspect number one, but she didn't pursue the point.

Lisa let Smith guide her out of the lab, and back down to the car park, where a black Renault was waiting for them. The Ministry didn't like to use Japanese cars.

It wasn't far to Morgan Miller's house – the Professor liked to be able to walk to work. Lisa had been there many times before; Miller had lived in the same place throughout the years that she'd known him. It was a big house, with a small but lushly overgrown garden, and ivy crawling all over the walls. It looked horribly decrepit in the cold grey light of dawn, but it always had. It had been built at the very end of the nineteenth century, more than a hundred and fifty years ago, and no amount of regular patching-up could conceal the fact that it was ancient. Miller must

have bought it soon after the turn of the Millennium.

As Lisa got out of the car and walked to the door she tried to remember how old Morgan Miller was. She added it up, and made it seventy-seven, give or take a year. It was a wonder he was still working, but the University wouldn't force him to retire. He'd been trained during the golden age of genetic engineering, before the greenhouse crisis and the energy drought and the Great Economic Collapse. His skills were worth retaining, even though he'd never really fulfilled his early potential as a researcher. He'd won no prizes, had made no breakthrough to fame. He was just the eccentric man with the mice: an institution; a legend in his own lifetime.

There was a uniformed inspector waiting on the threshold – waiting, obviously, for Peter Smith. Lisa's heart sank as the inspector caught her eye and looked up, indicating that she should follow his gaze. One of the first-floor windows was doubly spider-webbed with cracks where two bullets had gone through it. Smith nodded to the waiting policeman, and the door was opened for him. Lisa followed him in, knowing what they were going to find.

It wasn't as bad as she expected. He wasn't dead. Both bullets had hit, but neither wound was fatal. He had bled all over the bed, but he was still breathing. It wasn't difficult to work out where the bullets had come from: a roof over the road. The mobile hospital arrived less than a minute after the Renault, and the duty surgeon moved past them, clearing the room while the support staff erected a sterile tent.

Lisa, with an entire career of examining corpses behind her, was by no means squeamish. To see someone you've known all your life go under the knife is hard for anybody, though. She felt frozen up inside, too stunned to begin thinking seriously about the questions that came into her mind. She knew, though, that Peter Smith would soon be directing those questions at her. The fact that she didn't have the ghost of an answer was unexpectedly distressing. Morgan Miller had been shot, and she – his friend, lover and supposed confidante – couldn't begin to guess why.

She sat down in an armchair that she remembered only too well, in the room he used as a study, and stared at the mute screen of the word-processor on the desk. Smith was still talking to the men outside, in the hallway, and she relaxed into the moment's respite, letting her eyes roam over the disc library that filled two walls of the study. Thirty thousand discs, Miller had boasted to her. His own notes and records filled several hundred; the rest was all published stuff – journals, textbooks, reports, theses. There was no fiction, no light relief. For that, he watched broadcast TV or bought videotapes. He had once told her, unashamedly, that he had never read a novel since leaving school.

It didn't take long for the Men from the Ministry to catch up with the state of play. They had no real witnesses to question, but they had Lisa. From their point of view, she was their only lead, until they could find Stella Filisetti – which might well take some time, if she really was involved. If she was, she was obviously not alone. The firebomb and the shooting presumably had different perpetrators. Lisa knew that one plus one added up to a conspiracy,

and that Mr Smith from the Ministry was going to be worried about it.

Amazingly, Smith – who was still being scrupulously polite – made her a cup of tea.

"While we wait," he said evenly, "I'd be obliged if you could tell me all that you can about Professor Miller's work. We have no file, you see, and I understand that you..." He left the sentence dangling, with polished discretion.

"I knew him socially," said Lisa. "We did talk about his work – but all his records are here. They could tell you far more than I."

Smith let his own gaze travel over the serried ranks of discs. "In time," he said, "we can have a team go through them. But we need to act in the meantime, and we need everything you can give us, as I'm sure you understand. Had he any enemies?"

"He had one," replied Lisa, levelly. "But I haven't the slightest idea who or why. I assure you that I'm not being uncooperative. I really don't know."

Smith smiled, weakly. "You know more than we do," he pointed out. "Suppose you tell me just what kind of man he was?"

Lisa sipped tea, and wondered what the answer to that question really was.

"I'll tell you what I can," she promised. "I want to work it out in my own mind, too. He was a friend of mine. A very good friend."

Smith smiled at her – not knowingly, but smoothly, and she realized that she wasn't just a witness. Until they had checked her file very carefully, she was suspect number two.

Clearly, even the Men from the Ministry always began their investigations with *cherchez la femme*.

"I suppose it was unusual in those days," said Lisa, "for a student of biology to get a police scholarship. But police work and forensic science were becoming ever more intricately involved with one another, and identification by gene-typing was on its way to becoming standard. Most of the police scholarships were going to computer scientists, because computer-related crime was seen as the boom area. I suppose I was interested in Applied Genetics first and police work second, and it was really a way of financing my studies that made me take up the police scholarship.

"Before the Crash there was a flood of research money for all aspects of applied genetics. Genetic engineering of bacteria and plants was already making an economic impact on food-production, and there was intense interest in the possibility of engineering animals for meat production. We could see the energy crisis coming, of course, and the rise in sea level due to the greenhouse effect had already begun. Everyone knew that the entire world agricultural system was on the brink, and the developed nations all wanted to make progress in factory farming, to take food production out of the fields. So the Department, in the days when I was a student here, was heavily committed to the development of techniques for animal engineering.

"Morgan Miller, in those days, was in the very forefront of his profession. His mice have become a bit of a joke over the years, but at that time animal engineering was all the rage. What the engineers were learning



Illustrations by Iain Byers

to do to mice was just the first step toward engineering pigs, cattle – and it was all the more exciting because of the difficulties.”

“Don’t get too technical,” Smith warned. “I’m no expert.”

“Bacteria and plants are easy to engineer,” Lisa explained, “because they can reproduce asexually. You can only introduce new genes into a very small number of bacterial cells in a culture, but if you introduce a gene conferring immunity to a particular antibiotic you can easily isolate the transformed cells and obtain a pure culture which multiplies very rapidly. Plants produce vast quantities of seed, and it’s not difficult to inject new genetic material into the seeds – when they develop you only need one usefully transformed plant, because you can then clone it easily.”

“Transforming mammals is a very different matter: mammals produce relatively few egg-cells, which are fairly delicate. If you extract them from an ovary, fertilize them *in vitro*, and then pump new DNA into them you spoil nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand, and even the odd one that begins to develop usually aborts very quickly. Producing a transformed organism is extremely difficult.”

“Several people in the Department, including Miller, were trying to solve this problem. They were trying to find a way of getting new DNA into a mammalian egg-cell without having to remove it from its ovary. They were trying to create artificial viruses which would seek out and invade egg-cells, while leaving ordinary cells alone, integrating their DNA with the chromosomes of the eggs. They called these artificial viruses MB viruses – MB stands for “magic bullet.” They hoped that once the basic techniques were proven, they could rapidly move on from experimental animals to real practical applications.

“The MB viruses weren’t too difficult to develop, though it wasn’t easy equipping them to infect egg-cells alone. But egg-cells are differentiated within the body by biochemical markers, which can be used to trigger the viruses. I don’t know the very intimate details, because it wasn’t specifically my field. Professor Miller wasn’t my teacher, once I got beyond the elementary stages – he was a friend.

“I know that Morgan’s research ran into problems, though, after the development of the MB viruses. It’s all very well to transform the egg-cells inside a female mouse; you still have to turn those egg-cells into new mice, and you still have a dreadful wastage rate. The vast majority of the female mice that Morgan shot with his magic bullets simply turned up sterile, because the transformed ova weren’t compatible with ordinary sperm. On the very rare occasions when a transformed mouse was born, it was no use – you can’t take cuttings from a live mouse the way you can from a plant. In order to breed you need two mice of opposite sexes with identical transformations – a real billion-to-one shot.

“So the research became blocked. Gradually, over the years, a lot of workers abandoned the whole line as a blind alley, but Morgan wouldn’t give up. By degrees, he lost his place in the forefront, and I suppose he eventually got left in a backwater. He wasn’t bitter about it, though – he really wasn’t interested in fame or fortune. His pride wasn’t invested in his repu-

tation, it was all tied up in his work. He persisted with his magic bullets: experiment after experiment, generation after generation. Everyone respected him for it, I think, even though they did make sarcastic jokes about it.

“I remember that Miller was always impressed by one strange fact about mammal egg-cells, and that was the way that nature wasted them. Male mammals produce sperm throughout their lives, as long as the testes are capable of it. By the time a female mammal is born, though, she has all the egg-cells she’s ever going to have, and she loses most of them long before she reaches puberty and becomes fertile.

“The peak number of egg-cells is actually reached – oddly enough – in the early embryo, and millions of them die before the female is even born. I can’t remember the exact figures for mice, but I do recall that the human female starts off with about seven million egg-cells, in the fifth month of gestation. By the time she’s born, she has only two million, and by the time she reaches puberty, she’s lost the vast majority of those. She runs out altogether long before the end of her life-span – that’s when she reaches the menopause.

“What kind of evolutionary sense that makes, I don’t know, but I do know that it was something that fascinated Morgan Miller. He told me once that if only he could transform those millions of cells in such a way as to protect them from degeneration, then he could take the ovaries from a new-born mouse and have a vast population to aim his magic bullets at – and then, if he only had some way of making those embryos develop outside the body, in artificial wombs, he would have the odds on his side instead of against him. That was the idea which seemed to dominate his research during the last twenty or twenty-five years. That was the key, he believed, to developing efficient techniques for the genetic engineering of mammals.

“I can’t tell you how far Miller got with his work, but I know he didn’t reach the end. He never did produce a pair of true-breeding engineered mice. He didn’t even manage to develop the artificial wombs necessary to his grand plan. As far as I know, all he ever managed to do was produce generation after generation of sterile mice, shot so effectively by his magic bullets that they might just as well have been dead.

“He managed, I suppose, half a dozen live births of transformed mice every year, but never a pair. He induced gigantism, contrived some interesting alterations of fundamental biochemistry – produced, in fact, some fascinating freaks. But without a way of establishing a breeding population, it all came to seem rather futile.”

“But somehow,” said Smith, “he discovered something that made him worth killing.”

“It looks that way now,” said Lisa, “but your guess is as good as mine as to what it might have been. The mice are all dead, Miller may not pull through. And his lab assistant...?”

“Think she’s the one?”

Lisa shrugged. “Never really knew her. Didn’t look to me like a dab hand with a high-powered rifle. Have your people come up with anything in her background?”

He shook his head. "Nothing obvious. Thirty-two years old. Unmarried. Good degree in Applied Genetics, doctorate from Oxford. Came here eight years ago. Politically active, but only with radical feminist groups. Votes Green. No relatives outside the country, in spite of her name. Clean credit record. No significant ties with industry."

"In that case," said Lisa, "it looks as if we'll just have to wait for Miller. If the surgeon can save him, he can give us the whole story. "If not..."

Smith didn't look particularly optimistic about that. He obviously didn't expect a man in his seventies to survive two bullets in the torso. His thoughts were already dwelling on other lines of inquiry.

"He never married, did he?" asked the tall man, trying to sound as if he were merely making conversation.

"No," said Lisa. "He was wedded to his work. An essentially solitary man. He liked his relationships casual and occasional. It suited him."

"And you never married either?"

"No," she said, levelly. "Two of a kind. Three, if you count Stella."

"You could say that he used you both," he suggested, calmly.

"Or that we used him. Nobody shot him out of jealousy, Mr Smith. And I doubt if Stella shot him because she was a radfem – even though he was a trifle Victorian in his attitude to women. Did you find the weapon?"

He shook his head.

"If he does die," said Lisa, grimly, "I don't think you'll find out why until you've searched those discs with a fine-toothed comb. Time seems to be against you."

"Against us, Dr Friemann. This is a police matter too. And for you, a personal matter. We've checked your record too, as you knew we must. I'm satisfied that you're in the clear, and I know that we can rely on your cooperation. I hope you won't take it amiss when I say that I'd rather it was a personal matter."

Lisa stared at him, feeling that she was on the brink of exhaustion. She had become unused to missing her sleep. "It wasn't personal," she said, confidently. "No one had anything personal against the mice."

For once, Smith couldn't contrive a smile. Behind him, the door opened and the surgeon came in. Bluntly, he told them both that Miller would be lucky to last two days – and might only last a matter of hours if he were hyped up with sufficient drugs to make him available for questioning, instead of being allowed to rest.

The Man from the Ministry didn't even glance at Lisa.

"Do what you need to do to wake him up," he said. "We have to have the answers, and we can't wait."

Miller was still inside the sterile tent which the medical team had erected by his bed. A senior paramedic remained when the mobile hospital took off; she was the official death watch. Smith told her to leave the room, and she obeyed without question. He let Lisa stay, though – probably not because he trusted her, but because he thought her presence might help to rally the patient's ailing spirits.

As far as Lisa could judge, the professor's ailing spirits would need all the help they could get. He was very weak. If there'd been any real chance of his making a recovery, the surgeon would never have allowed him to be pumped full of drugs to bring him back to consciousness.

Smith didn't waste any time. "Professor Miller," he said, "we need to know who shot you, and why. They bombed your laboratory too. It's all destroyed."

Morgan Miller stared at his interlocutor, but didn't seem to understand. Smith frowned, and looked across at Lisa, appealing for help. She took a gentler line.

"Morgan," she said, softly, sitting down on the edge of the bed. "It's Lisa. Lisa Friemann."

He shifted his gaze to meet hers, and blinked in recognition. "Lisa," he said, faintly. He seemed surprised by the fact that he was able to talk. He paused for a moment, obviously preparing to say something more. Smith tensed, waiting eagerly, but all Miller said was: "It doesn't hurt."

"No," said Lisa, "it won't hurt."

"Bad, though," croaked Miller, "isn't it?"

"Pretty bad," admitted Lisa. "I don't suppose you remember being hit – you must have been asleep."

"Bad dream," he murmured. "Very bad dream."

"You were shot, Morgan. Someone fired from across the street. You were hit twice."

The man on the bed managed a very weak smile. "Magic bullets," he said.

"That's what we want to know," Smith intervened.

"Tell us why."

Lisa looked up at the Ministry Man. "Unfortunately," she said, dryly, "I think he was only making a joke."

"Then you'd better tell him," said the tight-lipped Smith, "that we don't have time for jokes."

Lisa returned her attention to Morgan Miller. "Morgan," she said, "who would want to burn the mice? They're all dead, Morgan. All the mice. Who would want to do that?"

A few seconds went by while Miller struggled to digest this information. Then tears came into his eyes, and Lisa knew that she was getting through.

"All dead?" he queried, his voice trembling.

"Burned to death," she said. "All burned. Who would do a thing like that?"

Miller opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out. He had been looking at Lisa, but now he looked beyond her, at Peter Smith.

"Who's he?" he asked. There was a slight catch in his voice because of the tears.

"My name is Peter Smith. I'm from the Ministry of Defence. We need to know why someone might want to steal the results of your work – or to put a stop to it. We need to know what you found out."

"Defence?" repeated Miller, dazedly. At first, Lisa thought that he was simply unable to understand. But then he added: "There isn't any defence."

Lisa imagined the effect that words such as those must have on a man like Smith. All kinds of memories must be coming back to him, of the so-called Plague Wars, which might not have been wars at all, but which wiped out a third of the human race in the early part of the century.

"What...?" Smith began, but Lisa silenced him with an irritated gesture.

"Tell us where to look, Morgan," she said. "Give us the reference. It must be in your files somewhere. You needn't try to tell us. Just tell us where to look."

But Miller turned his head away, and refused to look at either of them. His brow was furrowed, as if he was as deep in thought as the drugs would let him be. Smith opened his mouth again, but caught Lisa's eye and shut it. They waited. Finally, Miller said: "It's hidden. Nobody knows."

"Somebody burned the mice," said Lisa, patiently. "Whatever you had hidden, somebody knows now. You have to tell us what it is."

Miller moved his head from side to side, still not looking at them. The drugs were inhibiting his motor responses, but they couldn't entirely cut out his agitation.

"Don't try to move," said Lisa. "You have to conserve all your strength. The more time it takes, the more strength you waste. For God's sake, Morgan, tell us now, and then you can rest."

But all Morgan said in reply, his words heavy with drug-sodden anguish, was: "Nobody knows. Nobody knows."

"Then you must tell us now," said Lisa, soothingly. "You must tell us. You have to tell someone, Morgan. You can't carry secrets to the grave."

Smith frowned at her, obviously uncertain how sensible it was to let Miller know he was dying, but he said nothing. He was apparently content to defer to her judgment.

But Morgan Miller didn't respond to her plea. When Lisa had come into the room she had not been sure that Miller had anything to tell them, but what was happening now was bewildering. She felt herself growing angry – angry because Morgan Miller was nursing some secret which he had never shared with her, and which he still would not share, even though he was on his deathbed. The security angle, if there was one, did not distress her overmuch; what she felt was a sense of personal betrayal.

"Professor Miller," said Smith, sternly, when he saw that Lisa wasn't going to get any reply. "You have to tell us everything. It's absolutely necessary."

Miller looked at him, and curled his wrinkled lip. His eyes seemed very bright. "What will you do?" he asked, hoarsely. "Torture me?"

"What the hell is going on here?" demanded Smith of Lisa. "What is he playing at?"

It was Lisa's turn to frown. "We don't understand, Morgan. We don't understand why you won't talk to us. We're trying to catch the people who shot you – the people who bombed the mice. Was it Stella Filisetti, Morgan? Has she any reason to do this?"

Miller tried again to shake his head, and managed to move his right hand from beneath the blanket on the bed. He tried to wipe the tears from his eyes, but he had great difficulty controlling his hand.

"Stella?" he said, more as if he were talking to himself than answering the question. "Must be Stella. How... nobody knows! Nobody knows."

There was a sharp rap on the door, and Smith turned to open it. Lisa couldn't see who it was, nor could she hear what was rapidly whispered. When Smith turned round, though, he was clearly in an agony of indecision. He beckoned her over to the door.

"They've located Filisetti," he said. "She's under observation. We've got to pick her up. We need to find out how many others are involved, nip the whole thing in the bud even if we don't know what it's all about."

"Let me stay here," she whispered. "I think I can get him to explain, if there's time. I stand a better chance alone – if there's anyone in the world he trusts..."

Smith hesitated, but then nodded. He crossed swiftly to the bed, leaning over the plastic tent to look at Morgan Miller, who had closed his eyes. There was no way to be sure that he would open them again. Smith turned back, nodded curtly at Lisa, and then left.

Lisa went back to the bedside, and pulled up a tattered old armchair, over whose worn back she had deposited her clothing on so many occasions. She sat down, and now that she was unobserved, she began to weep. She had not wept for many years, and hoped that she never would again.

Lisa would not have said, had she been asked – or even if she had posed the question secretly to herself – that she loved Morgan Miller. She had loved him, long ago, but had long since outgrown it, as she had outgrown all passion and almost all affection. There remained, however, a sense in which Morgan Miller was closer to her than any other human being, and he was dying on their bed, where an assassin had shot him while he slept – as he almost always did – alone. If this was not an occasion for tears, there could surely be no other.

For several minutes, she was content to let the silence last, to secrete herself within her grief. Then she stood up again, went to the bedhead and removed the bug that Smith had planted on its rear side. She wrapped it carefully in a handkerchief, and put it in her pocket.

"You bastard, Morgan," she said, in a low tone. "You have to tell me. You hear me? You have to tell me. I'm surely entitled."

Morgan Miller opened his eyes again.

"Jesus, Lisa," he said, faintly. "They really did it. They really killed me."

"Yes they did," she said, levelly. "It's a miracle you've got the time you have. Whatever it is, someone knows about it. I want to know. I've never asked you for anything else. Never. But I want to know, Morgan. I want to know."

Morgan Miller smiled a kind of smile that she had seen on his faded lips a hundred times before – a smile of superiority. She had never liked it. She sat down in the armchair again, and waited.

"Lisa," he said, quietly, "you're not going to like it."

"Tell me anyway," she said, in a cold, sardonic tone that he must have heard a hundred times before, and probably liked no better. "You wouldn't want to go to your grave keeping secrets from the only woman you ever really loved, now would you?"

"Hell no," he said. "Now how could I do a thing like that to you?" His voice, as he said this, was little more than an icy whisper.

He paused for some time, while Lisa waited, calmly.

Theirs had always been a relationship which had made many demands on her patience and insensitivity.

"It was a pure fluke," said Miller, keeping quite still and relaxed. His voice was faint, but no longer hoarse — his state seemed almost trance-like. "A shot in a million. I've tried to work out the biochemistry, but I never could. The key protein is some kind of controller, like the ones which determine the switching on and off of selected genes in different kinds of specialized cell.

"It was a bullet virus — one of those I adapted specifically to infect oocytes. It was intended to preserve the egg-cells, cut the wastage rate. It preserved them, after a fashion. It stopped them dying off so fast, so that the infected mice were born with something like ninety per cent of the egg-cell store intact. There was no somatic transformation — at first I didn't think I'd achieved anything at all, except that the oocytes could be preserved in any infected female. I kept a number of the mice alive, to track the oocytes through the lifespan. When they reached the right age, puberty didn't happen. No ovulation. The mice were sterile. Seemed even more useless, then, but I kept monitoring, just in case.

"I sectioned a lot of tissue, just to track the rate of degeneration, without seeing anything unusual. The rate was still very slow. Then I caught the anomaly — an oocyte that had started dividing, forming what looked like a tumour. Not a virgin birth, you understand. It wasn't forming an ordinary embryo, and the new cells looked to be dispersing, like a cancer in metastasis. It looked then as if the virus was a killer, and I kept the remaining live mice under observation to see what would happen. I waited for them to show external symptoms, but they didn't. I waited, and waited, and the damn things didn't die.

"They didn't die at all. Ever.

"Eventually, I figured it out. The oocytes which were developing were producing new juvenile cells which gradually displaced the maternal cells in the mother's body. They were producing new individuals, all right, but not separate individuals. As the mother got older she became a mosaic, except that the new cells weren't genetically different: these freak oocytes were diploid clone-daughters of the original. They were rejuvenating the host body, over and over again. Instead of living the one lifetime programmed into its originating egg-cell, each mouse was living a whole series of lifetimes, cannibalizing her own egg-cells. I'd infected the damn things with immortality.

"You probably remember the old joke about the chicken just being an egg's way of making another egg. DNA has always been immortal; our chromosomes live forever, they just use organisms as a way of swapping their individual genes around. Bacteria and protozoans generally don't bother — their cells just keep on dividing. It only needed a little genetic nudge to put the mouse chromosomes on a new track, so that they express their immortality through a series of individuals who would just grow up to displace one another inside the same body, shedding the aged cells just as a growing snake periodically sloughs its skin.

"I had a complete gene-map of the bullet virus that had done the trick. Its infective capacity was mouse-specific but the active DNA wasn't. I knew that I could tailor a virus to do the same thing to human egg-cells. Two or three misses, maybe, but the problem wasn't



difficult. Armed with that gene-map, anyone with a decent lab could do it. But without the map, even knowing that it could be done, it would be impossible. You know how many ways there are to perm four bases into a string of DNA a hundred units long. I knew it would be hundreds of years before anyone else turned up another fluke like it. So I hid the map."

Lisa had listened in silence, not wanting to break the rhythm of his speech, fearing that if the flow were once switched off, it might be very difficult to get it going again. Now, though, Morgan Miller had stopped of his own accord, and he was watching her with his bird-bright eyes, waiting for her reaction, as if challenging her to work out the pattern of his motives for herself.

"You discovered immortality?" she queried. "And you decided to keep it a secret between you and the mice?"

He nodded slightly, but said nothing. She realized that she had left something out. "You discovered a way to make females immortal," she corrected herself. "Only females."

He nodded again.

"What have you been doing?" she asked. "Trying to find a magic bullet that would transform sperm-cells the same way? In the interests of fair-play?"

"It wouldn't have worked," he said, softly. "A sperm-cell doesn't have the supporting biochemical apparatus. It's just a bundle of chromosomes. Its genes can only become active after invading another cell. Like a virus, in a way. In biochemical terms, males have always been parasitic on females. When oocytes can do it on their own, a species doesn't really need males."

Lisa thought about the implications of what Morgan Miller had discovered, and what he had done – or not done – about it.

"How long ago, Morgan?" she asked, eventually.

He tried to shrug his shoulders, but couldn't. "Forty years," he said.

Forty years ago, thought Lisa, coldly. I was in love with Morgan Miller then, and my body contained hundreds of thousands of egg-cells. Hundreds of thousands of potential lifetimes. And he knew – even then, he knew.

She had known, of course, that Morgan Miller had not loved her, and that he never would. He would never have given her a child. Why should she be shocked because he had known a way by which he might have made her an elixir of life, and had not even tried?

Whatever happens now, she thought, it's too late. I'm too old, and there are no more egg-cells left.

Stella Filisetti, she remembered, was young enough still to be carrying viable egg-cells.

"Why did you tell Stella?" she asked.

"I didn't. Must be cleverer than I gave her credit for. A dozen immortal mice in a population of a thousand, all looking alike. I thought they were well enough hidden even in plain view. She always liked the mice, though – had a curious silliness fondness for them. Sentimentality is so out of place in a biologist."

"You bastard, Morgan," said Lisa, levelly. "If she hadn't set you up, I swear I'd shoot you myself." She was surprised, as she said it, how tempted she was.

It was odd, in a way, because she felt no white heat of passionate rage. If, as she felt tempted to, she were to rip aside the sterile tent, pick up the pillow and smother him, she would be doing it quite coolly. She knew, though, that there was no point.

"Well," he said, softly, "it's out now. Once she knew there was something hidden, she must have gone through my files very carefully. I had too many copies of the map, I guess. Maybe I should have destroyed it, if I really wanted to save mankind." He put a faint stress on the word "mankind," to emphasize that he meant just that, and no more.

"Did you just?" asked Lisa. "Want to save mankind, that is?"

He grinned. "I rather liked the world as it was," he said. "In spite of the greenhouse crisis, in spite of the plague wars, in spite of the energy shortage, in spite of the economic collapse. Not a bad world, for one such as I. I'm glad I had no sons, though – Stella's people will make sure that the future's very different."

"Smith's men have found her," Lisa told him. "There's every chance that they'll get the map back, if she hasn't already run off and distributed a thousand copies. I don't suppose she has. The fact that they bombed the lab and tried to kill you suggests that they don't intend making their little discovery public. I think they want to keep it to themselves. Not so sentimental after all, you see."

He grinned again. "So much for sisterhood," he said.

Lisa studied his face carefully. "Why didn't you tell Smith?" she asked.

"Didn't have time."

"Yes you did. You held back. You waited for him to go, and then you told it all to me. Why?"

"Why'd you wrap up the bug?" he countered.

"It was making me self-conscious. I thought I'd like us to have a little privacy."

"I don't like men from the Ministry," said Miller.

"My first inclination is always to tell them nothing."

"It seems," observed Lisa, "that your first inclination is to tell everyone nothing."

"I told you."

"Forty years too late."

"Too late for you, perhaps. But I never thought of you as a selfish person, Lisa. It was something I always admired in you. Authentic altruism. A sense of duty. You've always been my favourite."

Lisa watched him, knowing that he was playing a kind of game. He was teasing her, playing cat and mouse. There he was, on his deathbed, enjoying the idea that the future of the world might be still his to determine, his to play with, his to dispose.

She still felt a little like killing him, but didn't intend to.

Instead, she knew, she would wait, and listen, and see what he decided to do. If he wanted to, he could tell her where to find another copy of his map. If he wanted to, he could die silent, leaving it for the painstaking Mr Smith to seek out with his fine-toothed comb. She didn't need three guesses to know what Mr Smith would do with it.

There was a long pause while they watched one another, waiting to find out which one of them would break the silence, and what he, or she, would say.

Agents of the Ministry of Defence arrested Stella Filisetti later that day. Within a matter of hours, they had made seven more arrests. Following a trial – which was held in secret because of its implications for national security – eight women were eventually sentenced to indefinite imprisonment in an unspecified location.

When Peter Smith returned to Morgan Miller's house the professor was still alive, and he remained alive long enough to repeat all that he had told Lisa Friemann. Smith's men then began a very careful and exhaustively thorough search of Morgan Miller's data-discs, looking for the crucial gene-map.

They also began an intensive search for Lisa Friemann, but by the time they found her, it was too late.

By then, far too many people had seen the map, and the world was already embarked upon its new era.

Brian Stableford needs no introduction to Interzone readers (see the stuff by him or about him in our last several issues), so let's talk about **Garry Kilworth** instead since there was no space to print brief notes at the end of his story, "The Men's Room." Garry, whose last piece in these pages was "Dop*elgan*er" (issue 21), has published so many novels in the past year or two that we've begun to lose count. They include *Abandonati* (Unwin, 1988) and *Hunter's Moon: A Story of Foxes* (Unwin, 1989), plus sundry titles from his other hardcover publisher, The Bodley Head. Recently he moved from Essex to Hong Kong, where his wife has taken up a new appointment as a senior social worker. We have no doubt he will continue to write furiously. (As does Brian Stableford. Sorry, Brian.)

SMALL ADS

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Instruments of Love

John Clute

At the end of the review column which appears under my name in *Interzone* 28, a short postscript can be found appended to a notice of Connie Willis's *Lincoln's Dreams*. When I wrote that notice (the postscript says) I hadn't yet run across Richard Adams's new novel, *Traveller* (Knopf, \$18.95; Hutchinson, £12.95), published only a few months before; but at this point the postscript, which had been transmitted by telephone from America to Brighton, stops slyly and mysteriously short, and anyone reading it, without more detailed information about the plot of *Lincoln's Dreams* than I had provided, would have been at a loss to understand what in the world I was trying to convey. It was this. The novels in question feature similar attitudes towards a most unusual character. *Traveller* is the autobiography of a horse in the Civil War. The female protagonist of Willis's haunted tale may find herself not unconventionally inhabiting the dreams of Robert E. Lee, but the male protagonist of *Lincoln's Dreams* – tireless and unstinting in his worshipful services to the dreamer – is in his essential nature a kind of embodiment of Lee's faithful charger, whose name is of course *Traveller*.

From the heart of Florida, where my notice of the Willis book was written, the dream grammar and abiding trauma of the Civil War glow in the mind's eye with a strange suborning remoteness. One's thoughts are drawn northwards – out of the ravaged flatlands of this conquered state, whose very place-names co-opt and mock the Indians and Blacks massacred for *Lebensraum* long before the American Nightmare split the land wide open in 1860 – as to a vortex whose allure is haunting, hypnagogic, hymeneal. Stuck like parietal microbes to the edges of the plundered swamps and plains – in Miami or Sarasota or Arcadia – it is perhaps no wonder that Floridians endure an exile from the organic, and that book-reviewers of novels about the undying schisms of the War long to drive north, into the memory of the storm; and we did so. Once into South Carolina, we found an exit from the Interstate, and slipped eastwards into Charleston. In the supernal urban beauty of the Old Town, which slaves had constructed for polo-rooms, one was tempted to kick the dusky parquet pavements and to say: This I refute, Ruskin. Next day, driving north into pine forests and shanties and redneck caravans, we turned the radio on. A male voice, clearly that of an actor, was in the midst of recounting a sad but weirdly contextless tale about blue men and grey men and someone called marse robert, who could not get his commands properly conveyed through the shattering haze of battle. Sepulchral anecdotal, the actor went on to

describe horrific and hallucinated scenes of carnage and confusion. After the voice finally stopped, an announcer promised that further excerpts from Richard Adams's new novel *Traveller* would follow soon. I got to a phone as soon as I could.

So what was happening here? What was an English writer doing in the heart of the American Nightmare pretending to be a horse? What was he doing passing on to grown readers a view of General Lee (Marse Robert in *Traveller's* slave lingo) whose adulatory simplicities could only come from the mouth of an animal that liked being ridden on? And why was he eulogizing, through the musings of this holy-innocent equine, the wrong side of the War that split the Home? There are at least two answers. The first is that the tireless intelligent long-lived *Traveller*, whose extensively documented life features in memoirs and histories and paintings of the Civil War, might have been too tempting for an animal-ventriloquist to ignore, though dangerous to succumb to; and it is certainly the case that in Adams's hands *Traveller* – like Latro in Gene Wolfe's *Soldier of the Mist* – has at times a dawn freshness of vision which washes the world clean. The second answer is all about exile. Like a book-reviewer escaping the malls of the diaspora northwards into Carolina, or like Connie Willis crafting an exquisite honey-trap for the analysis of cultural nostalgia in *Lincoln's Dreams*, Richard Adams approaches the hypnotic Matter of the South as an immigrant. Only so can one understand the convert's fervour within the rhythms of his ventriloquism, the fragile simplicities of its adulation of General Lee, whose skill at protracting the first universal war caused the deaths of men and women in their hundreds of thousands. Though Adams's behaviour once within the walls is cloyingly patriotic, *Traveller* is in fact a Trojan horse, and it is as an artifact of protective camouflage that one must see the book. Through the mouth of a horse, Adams hopes to find an innocent vision of the South, one stripped of any moral contamination. And thus he refutes Ruskin.

Robert Holdstock's fascination with the Matter of Britain, on the other hand, has none of the cunning of the exile. Both *Mythago Wood* (1984) and

its sequel *Lavondyss: Journey to an Unknown Region* (Collancz, £11.95) focus on their subject matter with an Ancient-Mariner glare that slips quite often from mere persistence into the unconsciously comic. In its button-holding cod-Jung portmanteau literalness even the title of the first book comes perilously close to Stuffed Owl country, the very term "mythago" having been made up by Holdstock to define – and perhaps to over-define – figures like Robin Hood begotten within the abyssal chthonic resonator of Ryhope Wood by a kind of marriage of myth and inchoate ur-reality: All mimsy were the mythagos. But the gawkishness does not last. The heart of the book is unforgettable, laced through with an honest and clearly conscious desiderium. The humans who enter the outer realms of Ryhope in *Mythago Wood* find that the further inwards they penetrate, the huger and more unbearable becomes the ur-reality of the heartwood; it is a movement towards epiphany that should hush the most raucous of readers. But in the second volume of what is now apparently destined to be a trilogy, that heartwood – almost fatally – is given a name, another ineffable Holdstock sobriquet.

"Lavondyss" is a term which teeters right on the edge of the risible, because although it contains within it hints of Avon and Lyonesse and Avalon and Dyss, and "lave" and "abyss," it also sounds like a new face cream. The protagonist of *Lavondyss*, a young girl whose extremely dogged trek into menarche shapes the first half of the book, and whose knocking on the door of Ryhope becomes very persistent indeed, has come inexorably to be addressed, in the mind of at least one reader, as the *Lavondyss* Lady. Nor is the first half of the book much improved by the twinkling presence of Ralph Vaughan Williams, half-disguised by the reduction of his surname to Williams, but – almost fatally – recognizable all the same, ponderous, canny, wistful, pedantic and pedestrian, like the pages he inhabits. Obsessed from infancy by Ryhope Wood, young Tallis Keeton spends her early years (and *Holdstock* 200 pages) making what seems to be a huge number of chthonic masks for future use, all of which are named; mapping and naming and teasing the outskirts of the Wood like the

virgin she still is; and practising her capacity to hollow – to open ways – into the heartwood, longing to go but stalling, stalling. It is rather like reading *The Silmarillion* before reading *The Lord of the Rings*.

Only with the beginning of part two, on page 197, does the book flame astonishingly into life. Tallis enters the land, whose shape increasingly becomes the shape of her abyssal self, and we find ourselves knotted into a metamorphic terrain of daunting rigour, an excremental sign-saturated inscape charged with twisting energy, like puns that lie too deep for tears. There is an ice age within the vast Wood. Mythago epistles clash by night, and at dawn the Wood is new, and more terrible than before. Tallis grows old. She follows the tooth of the inscape further in and further in, and comes to the gate into Lavondyss itself. But it is no gate. It is the language of her life now uttering her, and which she must enter, and pass through. The superbly deranging and intense final chapters of *Lavondyss* have an assurance one might almost call bardic, if that term had not been debased into something reassuringly nostalgic. These final chapters may be fuelled by desiderium, by a clear longing on Holdstock's part to reinhabit some anterior pole of Paradise deeply and somnolently wooded, but their final effect is of something far stricter and more chill than the usual late-culture pastoral caving of Robin Goodfellow and the lads. Finally, after a certain amount of chatter, *Lavondyss* begins to seem like a thing in itself, inexplicable and gravid. Richly and frighteningly, the book almost makes one believe that its final chapters take us to the place where all the stories start, in the bone shop. But the place where all the stories start is not a library. I for one can foresee no sequel that would not merely scour through bones and dead fire, already aeons distant from the thing itself, just to tell another anecdote.

Two books were published last year by writers whose usual work would normally be reviewed in *Interzone*, and although neither of these novels is properly science fiction or fantasy, both are of striking interest. Brian Aldiss's *Forgotten Life* (Gollancz, £11.95), a contemporary novel housing extensive flashbacks to World War II in India and points east, fails to convince only in those passages tiredly satirizing a female author of romantic high fantasies who goes by the name of Green Mouth and who is married to stodgy, stressed Clement Winter, an Oxford scholar in the climactic of his days. Where *Forgotten Life* grips the reader – and does not let go, for it is a beautifully paced narrative – is in its long rendering of Clement's house-of-

mirrors confrontation with his dead older brother Joseph, whose papers have come to him for sorting. Somehow, through stifling adolescence in 1930s Britain and shattering years in the War mangle of the Asian theatre, Joseph has managed to retain a vital freshness of being, however savaged by time. Through his papers, he seems to stare at Clement like Clement's buried self; and the ice begins to crack. Unlocked, Clement/Joseph begins to sort out their conjoined life, and the lessons learned – for Aldiss is a man of parts, and has been able to endow the two brothers with a very considerable largesse of experience and savvy – have a wide purchase indeed. The final effect of this summa of Aldiss's best self as a writer is of an adult sane openness to a world complexly and bravely faced.

It cannot be denied that there are problems with Michael Moorcock's own summa in *Mother London* (Secker & Warburg, £9.95), but it is also a telling commentary on the desperate effectlessness of the English literary establishment that this deeply worked through-composed singing edifice of a book was not at least shortlisted for the Booker Prize. (The exclusion of Aldiss's more orthodoxly framed tale is simply unfortunate.) *Mother London* is a celebration inwards of Moorcock's own city, a book whose population seems initially vast but which reduces finally to a set of avatars of the author twining their limbs and selfhoods together at the end of time – in this case the end of time is 1988 – as the city sinks. The three protagonists of *Mother London* are David Mummery, whose memoirs replicate details of Moorcock's own life in terms uncannily similar to the author's own autobiography published in *Contemporary Authors*; Joseph Kiss, a redemptive version of the author's well-known public persona; and Mary Gazalee, closely related to but far more palatable than the street-wise idiot-savant holy-fool protagonist of the unpleasant *Letters from Hollywood* (1986). But although each of these characters is clearly meant to be recognized as forming a mosaic portrait of the author, they are in fact very sharply differentiated on the page; though they share each other sexually over the decades, and all have histories of mental disorder, and Joseph and Mary do finally marry after the death of the stunted sacrificial Mummery, their most obvious mutuality, on the page, lies in the nature of their experiences in World War II. Each has lived through an incandescent life-fixing moment in the Blitz or later. The child Mummery has been transported from a near-direct hit by a magical black man; Mary Gazalee has saved her child from fire and fallen into a decade-long coma irradiated by dreams of a London closely resembling

the oneiric toy-town of the later Cornelius books; and Joseph Kiss, in a long and masterful scene set symmetrically at the very heart of the text, has defused a bomb and saved the Scaramanga sisters.

But it is with the Scaramanga sisters in their thatched cottage on the Regent's Canal, breeding chickens and celebrating life, that a damaging sentimentality begins to eat at the structure of the second half of *Mother London*. Because the heart of the book's plot, and its densest and chronologically earliest scenes, lie at what might be called its geographical centre, that second half, which gradually follows its tone-row of cues and scenes and characters back to the present, must constantly fight against a sense of anticlimax; and Moorcock has increasing recourse to device in his battle against that sense. The Scaramangas are nothing but device, and some set scenes – most notably a virtuoso "life-celebration" sequence at a fun fair in 1970 – try all too visibly to commandeer assent. But in the end the Scaramangas cannot vitiate even the least felt parts of the book, for its final effect – an effect irradiated by an at times glorious assault of marshalled detail – is that of an organon, resonant and tempered; the face of London (the face of the author). And all the notes sound. In the end, *Mother London* is an instrument of love.

Third-Worlding It Paul J. McAuley

It is obvious from even the most cursory examination that mainline science fiction is a literature mostly concerned, not to say obsessed, with winners and owners. The poor and the ordinary do not much figure in its grand designs, and then usually as misguided rent-a-mob rabbles which must be put down by the all-powerful hero to preserve social order or bring on the Brave New World. Just how important this kind of power fantasy is to core sf ideology was indicated by the objections made by some reactionary authors to cyberpunk, deploring its "amorality" in depicting characters who hustled a living in the darker corners of society without feeling any obligations, who refused to conform, who only ever changed the world by accident, never by design, along the way confirming their view that it was a pretty shitty place anyway. A bad attitude that can be summarized as thumbing your nose at the owners. (A more cogent criticism is that there are only so many variations that can be made on the capers of hardboiled streetwise disaffected minor criminals.) Post cyberpunk, let's consider a clutch of novels which takes this attitude into

the third world, into the realm of the underclasses, the rabble, the owned.

Bruce Sterling was, of course, the cyberpunk Movement's primary ideologue and manifesto writer. In his new novel, *Islands in the Net* (Legend, £11.95), his talent for welding fictional exposition and ideological conflict, used to great effect in his kaleidoscopic space opera *Schismatrix*, has been honed to scalpel sharpness, dissecting the impact of technology and the legacy of twentieth-century imperial adventurism on the post-millennial third world. It starts out from the cosy viewpoint of the privileged, as typified by Laura Webster, an insufferably smug post-millennium yuppie who lives in blissful domestic security with her husband and new baby in a kind of holiday-cum-conference centre she runs for Rizome, one of the new breed of ecologically and morally aware democratic multinational corporations that are more like extended families than companies. Nor is this a personal paradise, for Sterling has extrapolated Perestroika and the greening of politics into the best of all possible near futures. The Cold War is over and nuclear power and nuclear weapons have been abolished; a global information service, the Net, has transcended national barriers, and the first faltering steps towards a World Government are being taken; single-cell protein provides an over-abundance of food; why, even the right to bear arms has been abolished in the United States.

But because *Islands in the Net* is a science-fiction novel, we know that there must be a serpent in paradise. And of course the world is not as safe as it seems, as Laura and her husband, David, find out when Rizome decides to negotiate with Third World nation states like Grenada and Singapore—the Islands in the Net, havens for data pirates and renegade scientists. After one of the Grenadian delegation is murdered by an anonymous drone, Laura and David volunteer for a goodwill mission to Grenada, armed only with hightech videoshades that keep them linked to the Net, to reassure the data pirates that Rizome had nothing to do with the assassination. Soon enough Laura finds that her principles lead her deeper and deeper into the still-troubled Third World, as she uncovers an organization of vigilante fanatics, the FACT, which threatens to bring back all the evils of twentieth-century militarism.

It is one of the major ironies of this densely imagined and richly ironic novel that someone like Laura Webster should be the protagonist, for she is the antithesis of the traditional of hero, being female, deeply embedded in traditional bourgeois values, and above all not possessed of any of the unique knowledge, insight or powers

that turns so much of American sf into messianic wishfulfilment. She is both naive and ideologically committed, and possessed of that smug confidence found only in those unsullied by real pain or suffering—in short, she is rather infuriating. But it is rigorous adherence to her seemingly naive ideals that not only allows her to survive terrorist attack, revolution and ultimately imprisonment by a brutal African regime which is the front for the FACT, but also lends her the strength of will to go against Rizome's principles and tap into the Net to broadcast news of the corrupt complicity between FACT and the Vienna police which threatens global stability.

But the plot, a political thriller full of satisfactory twists (and, it must be said, perilously close to unravelling towards the end, when the menace of the FACT just sort of evaporates), is only the frame for the meat of the novel, a series of ideological confrontations and crises rooted in the implications of the power technology gives to the individual, for good or ill. Thus, while a mass-produced VCR allows an ordinary citizen to protest against sudden erosion of civil liberties, other products of the same hightech industrial base enable one man to wage an effective terrorist campaign against an entire city. Indeed, nothing is presented as black and white, wholly good or wholly bad. Even the loathsome suave FACT assassin, who rescues Laura from the missile strike he has called down upon data pirates escaping popular revolution in Singapore, has his reasons, his own moral code. Grenada may have a vile government, but the enthusiasm of its people for their lashed together appropriate technologies is exciting and infectious. There is a certain attraction in the rigorously pared-down lifestyle of the tribal desert guerrillas whose leader, a charismatic yet unstable ex-journalist, half Lawrence of Arabia, half Paul Muad'Dib, through somewhat improbable coincidence rescues Laura and enables her to tap into the Net at a crucial moment. And so on. And while Laura's actions contribute towards worldwide peace, her adventures cost her deeply, and at the end she is left to wonder whether the bland global peace desired by corporations like Rizome really is the best of all possible worlds.

It is lack of this kind of ambiguity, of the moral dimension of individual action, which vitiates so many of sf's heroic gestures. Cramped with vividly presented and convincing political, technical and economic speculation, *Islands in the Net* is a complex, multilayered and, above all, mature work. Read it.

Superficially, Gwyneth Jones's *Kairos* (Unwin Hyman, £12.95) is a dark mirror-image of Sterling's hopeful post-millennium world. It begins and ends in the underside of Britain thirty-odd years from now, a third-world police state in which society has become rigidly stratified between those who have and those who have not, where any attempts to change the order of things are ruthlessly suppressed. If in *Islands in the Net* information is an economic resource whose worth multiplies only in free market conditions, in *Kairos* information is hoarded and protected, for the privileged only. There are orbital cities and global information nets, but we glimpse them only in promotional leaflets blowing about a rubbish tip, or through culturally devalued s&v serial dramas. Meanwhile, although the superpowers have broken up their nuclear arsenals, war raging throughout Africa threatens to spill into the rest of the world at any moment; the ozone layer has been evaporated and ancient nuclear power stations spew out radioactive pollution; and protest has diminished to a kind of ritual confrontation between the threadbare alternative society and the riot police.

It is as if the nightmares of a typical Guardian reader have all come true, powerfully imagined with a kind of one-note bleak remorsefulness that pays less and less dividends as the novel progresses, riddled through an ironic inversion of one of the mainstays of British middleclass fiction, the growing apart of University friendships as the protagonists make their way in the real world, a sort of Glittering Prizes Goes To Hell. The inversion is emphasized by the fact that the four friends, two male, two female, who make up two couples, are all gay. The men are superficially successful, one an s&v actor, the other a scientist. The women, superficially, are not. Otto, daughter of a Labour Member of Parliament, runs a marginal feminist bookshop and dreams, ever more bitterly and hopelessly, of a feminist-bisexual utopia. Her lover, Sandy, the token prole, finds herself unemployable despite her degree and in debt because of it, forced by the State into menial welfare jobs. It is into Sandy's hands, symbolic of the powerless, the hopelessly marginalized, that the power to change the world accidentally falls.

A shadowy quasi-religious organization, BREAKTHRU, is secretly working changes on reality by judicious use of Kairos, a drug that allows the user to alter the quantum reality of the world; rather than changing the user, it changes the people around her. Costumed as golden angels (you can see one on the cover of *The Face* no. 77), BREAKTHRU's agents promulgate a kind of nihilistic Buddhism while recruiting suitable candidates to operate

the changes, but things get out of control when a relatively enormous amount of Kairos belonging to the stepbrother of the s&v actor, an executive member of BREAKTHRU, passes into the possession of Sandy. For Sandy has been so worn down by society that she wants nothing but nirvana, and the Kairos, so concentrated that its mere proximity is enough to transmute thought into deed, allows her to get her wish. Searching with her lover's child for his pet dog, kidnapped by the stepbrother (who is plotting a complicated act of surrealistic terrorism), the world begins to unravel and reality takes on a shifting multilevel quality as with grim satisfaction Sandy wills an asymptotic increase in entropy towards apocalypse. The novel is a harrowing tour-de-force, but the unalloyed bleakness of its scenario is redeemed by affectionate and authentic portrayal of the contradictory, human impulses of its characters, that for the most part (except at the very end, when a kind of normality is restored and a sort of happy ending is achieved for the sake of the pet dog) eschews sentimentality. Despite her unflinching and uncompromising portrayal of the lives of the unwilling sacrifices to progress, Jones cares for her characters, and she makes us believe and care for them. Still, we are left to wonder at her bleak vision: if sf is an exaggerated reflection of its times, are things that bad, here and now?

The scenario of Garry Kilworth's *Abandonati* (Unwin Hyman, £12.95) is potentially even bleaker than that of Kairos, although it is a good deal simpler (which is not to say simplistic). Almost everyone has deserted the Earth, taking almost everything of value. Only the gypsies and the hitherto invisible nation of street people, the *abandonati*, are left amongst the ruins and potsherds of civilization, to get by as best they can, which (except for the gypsies) is of course not very well. As the revised nursery rhymes at the head of each chapter make clear, the *abandonati* have very quickly been reduced to shambling anarchy, struggling against packs of wild animals and each other, at best eating vermin, at worst, resorting to outright cannibalism. But in Kilworth's dystopia even down-and-outs have dreams; they even have the ambition to try and realize them. *Abandonati* retails the quixotic quest of Guppy, who is haunted by visions of the past, Trader, a goodnatured giant with a certain amount of education, and Rupert, who is possessed of a natural affinity for machinery, and who dreams of building a spaceship and finding out where the rich people have gone. They don't succeed of course, but the search itself redeems each of them in a different way. It is a

funny, tender, hopeful tale, not without considerable charm, but also rambling and rather shapeless (despite being padded out by literary allusions to, amongst others, Homer's *Odyssey* and Wells's *The Time Machine*), leaving one with the feeling that it is a neat short-story idea just about stretched to novel length.

Finally, brief mentions of two short-story collections put out by those astute people at Kerosina. The first, Lucius Shepard's *The Jaguar Hunter* (Kerosina, £13.95) is also available in paperback (Paladin, £5.95), but there's no doubt that some of us will want a more permanent edition. Shepard, whose first published short story appeared only seven years ago, has rapidly established himself as one of the finest new sf/fantasy/horror writers. His stories share a strong blend of magical realism, exotic locales, and convincing characterization, almost every paragraph stamped with his authoritative almost painterly vision, warm and richly textured as a Vermeer. In the best stories in this collection, "The Man Who Painted the Dragon Griaule," for instance, or "Salvador," even the most commonplace observations are transformed into luminous signs in an allusive, seamless poetic whole. *The Jaguar Hunter* is an invaluable marker in a meteoric career.

Storeys From the Old Hotel (Kerosina, £13.95) assembles no less than thirty-five of Gene Wolfe's short stories which so far have avoided or escaped collection, from sources as varied as *The New Yorker* and *Interzone*. One or two, such as a couple of stories from a shared-world anthology, are not much more than two-finger exercises, but the rest demonstrate Wolfe's playful, allusive and often downright sly literary awareness, dense with ideas and changed signs, and there is a usefully revealing introduction which sets out the origin of every one of the stories. Admirers of Wolfe will want this collection for the sake of completeness; I advise anyone who is interested in the craft of sf to snap up the paperback edition, should it appear, for Wolfe has steadily grown into one of the best (if not the best) of contemporary sf writers. The stories in this collection, from the honed economy of the alternative history "Straw," to the allusive poetry of the post-holocaust "The Marvelous Brass Chessplaying Automaton," show why.

(Paul J. McAuley)

Hundreds and Hundreds

Like all good ideas, the one behind *Horror: 100 Best Books*, edited by Stephen Jones and Kim Newman (Xanadu, £11.99), is quite simple: get a clutch of writers to select a favourite horror novel and explain why in about two pages apiece. Of course, the interest lies in comparing their choices against yours, and seeing if you agree with the analyses.

So what's the ratio of signal to noise? Well, it's a nice touch – and not really cheating – to have Poe on Nathaniel Hawthorne, Lovecraft on Robert W. Chambers and Howard on James Branch Cabell. Among the living, Colin Wilson is perceptive about *Dracula*, Douglas E. Winter's choice of Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is imaginative, and John Skipp, on Brunner's *The Sheep Look Up*, displays an inspired interpretation of his brief. Milton Subotsky puts in a good word for Ambrose Bierce, Michel Parry recalls his first encounter with HPL, and Steve Rasnic Tem lauds Kafka's *The Trial*. It falls to Geoff Ryman to champion the subtleties of M. R. James.

Sarban's *The Sound of His Horn*, Kneale's *Quatermass and the Pit* and Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House* – all once highly thought of by this reviewer – are well represented by Suzy McKee Charnas, Stephen Laws and Lisa Tuttle respectively. Richard Christian Matheson keeps it in the family by selecting his Dad's excellent *I am Legend*, but spoils his turn by going for a Pseud's Corner approach. Dave Langford writes eloquently in defence of the indefensible – Chesterton's silly *The Man Who Was Thursday* – and George Hay does his best to convince us that David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus* (an emperor's new suit of clothes if ever there was one) is anything more than literary Mogadon. And it's a tribute to Terry Pratchett that he almost had me thinking Hodgson's *The House on the Borderland* may not be the florid and vastly over-rated froth I've always believed it to be.

At the end we have the editors' own list of recommended reading to feel contentious about. I like *Horror: 100 Best Books* because it evokes reactions. Only two questions remain unanswered: whatever happened to indexes, and why does Xanadu keep its publications such a closely-guarded secret?

Fantasy: The 100 Best Books by James Cawthorn and Michael Moorcock (Xanadu, £9.99), which does have an index, is slightly more of a curate's egg, a selection less catholic than the

one to be found in Horror – which is surprising, as fantasy would seem to allow for a wider scope. (This one is not a compilation of essays by various hands, but is largely the work of Cawthorn with some assistance from Moorcock.) However there are some interesting left-field entries – e.g. *Moby Dick* – and justice is done with the inclusion of T. H. White's largely unregarded *Miss Masham's Repose*.

The Haunting of Hill House turns up again, as does *The Trial* (this time in tandem with *The Castle*); and it was nice to see works by Kuttner, Blish and Gordon Honeycombe mentioned here. Featuring Moorcock's own *Stormbringer* was entirely justifiable and appropriate, I thought, although I might argue with the inclusion of *Amis's The Alteration*. This *Fantasy* volume may be a little less adventurous, and the presentation a mite dry in places, but by necessity it has a greater consistency of style than its stablemate.

It has to be said, though, that David Pringle's recent compilation of a hundred fantasies for another publisher (*Modern Fantasy: The Hundred Best Novels*, Grafton, 1988) has the edge, managing a higher ratio of bullseyes than Cawthorn/Moorcock. And, for the record, Pringle's *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels* (Xanadu, 1985) may be as definitive a selection of this sort as we're likely to get.

(Stan Nicholls)

Straightforward Skiffy

I'll start with some straightforward sf adventure stories, mostly reprints of books previously published in hardback or US paperback. *Young Rissa* by F. M. Busby (*Futura*, £2.99) tells of the childhood and youth of Rissa Kerguelen (I guess the author saw the names in a *Marine Biology* textbook) who is brought up in brutal privatized welfare homes, wins a lottery, and escapes to the "Hidden Worlds." It takes place at the same time as *Star Rebel* (reviewed in a previous *IZ*) and concerns some of the same people.

Torch of Honor by Roger MacBride Allen (*Arrow/Venture*, £2.99) is set 150 years from now when various nations are trying to preserve their Earthly way of life by colonizing nearby stars. The outer colonies are suddenly attacked by a mystery fleet, which, in the book's only real twist, turns out to be manned by descendants of our very own National Front, escaped in the starship *Oswald Moseley* to found a New Order in the skies. That's on page 49; the rest is pretty standard good-natured isn't-war-hell stuff.

In Sight of Proteus and Proteus Unbound by Charles Sheffield (NEL, £2.99 each) Form-Changing, a 24th-century technology that mixes bio-feedback, pharmacology and genetic engineering to alter the structure of the human body, has revolutionized medicine and cosmetics, abolished surgery and created the world's largest consumer market; but renegade scientists are illegally redesigning people in order to move into space. These two novels both concern Behrooz Wolf of the Office of Form Control, charged with the thankless task of policing this mess. Charles Sheffield seems to know a lot more about software than either biology or genetics, and I could never quite suspend my disbelief in the technology.

In The Hercules Text by Jack McDevitt (Sphere, £3.50) radio astronomers in the US receive messages from outside the home galaxy. When translated, the subject of the alien text seems to be something equivalent to poetry, philosophy, evangelism or even soliloquy. However the government risks war to prevent the USSR discovering the details – in case they learn to build super-weapons from scientific information which might be deduced from the text. This is a more creditable attempt at a novel of character than most "hard" sf, based around a NASA administrator and a Catholic priest who both suffer crises of conscience. It did drag me in towards the end: I really didn't want the war to happen.

Into The Out Of by Alan Dean Foster (NEL, £3.50) has a standard omni-competent hero (FBI undercover agent who breaks up Ku Klux Klan rallies), a shy but beautiful woman and an old Masai laibon (that's "witch-doctor" to the ethnocentric amongst us) who travel from Washington D.C. to Africa to stop up the door through which evil demons from another dimension are entering the world. In places the novel reads like an account of Foster's latest holiday in Tanzania and Kenya. The demons disguise themselves as tyre rubber and hide on the roads. I know that East African roads are full of shredded tyre rubber and I'm willing to believe that US roads are too, but I honestly don't remember ever seeing any here – so at least Britain's safe, unless the demons learn to hide out as plastic bin bags.

Mick Farren's Their Master's War (Sphere, £3.50) is a formula book. A party of barbarians are kidnapped by aliens, put through brutal military training and set to fight in an interstellar war they cannot comprehend. In the end they escape. This is hardly even an sf book: there are no real ideas, it is all off-the-shelf. It might as well have been set in any historical war. Is this the Mick Farren whose journalism and fiction I once enjoyed so much?

According to the blurb it is. I hope he's paying the rent.

Beyond Heaven's River by Greg Bear (VG/SF, £2.99) is much more fun. Bear has summoned up one of those gross high-tech information-economy futures: resources are abundant, the sky is full of aliens, Tokyo is a 20-kilometre cube and computer programs thank you personally when you tell them to sell a copy of themselves to your spaceship. A Japanese sailor kidnapped by aliens at the battle of Midway is discovered on an abandoned planet which (as the sole surviving inhabitant) he is now deemed to own. Individuals and corporations struggle, in a friendly sort of way, to find out who the aliens were, how they kept him alive, and why they bothered. It's all very competently done, if slightly silly, but there's no real denouement and the whole thing gets a little hard to follow towards the end.

That's also a problem with C. J. Cherryh's *Wave Without a Shore* (VG/SF, £2.99). The humans of the planet Freedom (on the fringe of the Union/Alliance cultures familiar from Cherryh's other works) have become inward-looking from centuries of ritual avoidance of the native aliens. A brilliant philosopher-sculptor creates a magnificent monument to the local ruler in the city of Kierkegaard, even as the aliens gather around him and the Alliance warships land. The book is spiced with rather arty philosophical dialogues which, unfortunately, don't quite come off.

Silence in Solitude by Melissa Scott (VG/SF, £3.50) is a sequel to *Five Twelfths of Heaven*, which I liked. Yes, heroine Silence Leigh gets to be a Magus (well, Maga); yes she gets to meet the Hegemon; yes, she still has to use her astrological learning to find the way to lost Earth; and yes, I still like it.

Someone trading on someone else's reputation is Michael P. Kube-McDowell with *Isaac Asimov's Robot City Book One: Odyssey* (£2.99) – a *Futura*/Orbit book, although Macdonald, Byron Preiss, and Maxwell/Pergamon all appear on the copyright details: I do wish these publishers would sort out who owns who, or does Robert Maxwell own everything now? [no, he owns just half of everything; Rupert Murdoch has the other half – Eds.]. The plot turns, frequently, on the famous Three Laws, which have to be extended to cope with aliens – a twist Asimov bravely denied himself for decades. (The other one I don't remember seeing is an explanation of how poverty can survive in Asimov's robot society. Surely a three-laws robot with enough brains to watch TV would be off to Calcutta with Mother Theresa because it couldn't "through inaction, allow" the starving humans to come to harm, despite the orders of its rich owners.) This one's for robot fans only.

In Isaac Asimov's own book *Fantasy Voyage II: Destination Brain* (Grafton, £3.99) an elderly American scientist is taken to the Russian miniaturization project. In a desperate attempt to save the phenomena of the original unbelievable book of the film, Asimov has to distort physical laws so much that he gives us telepathy and space travel with strong hints of faster-than-light travel and anti-gravity, and all sorts. It is very long and somewhat better than I expected, which isn't saying much.

Golden Days by Carolyn See (Arrow, £2.99) is certainly the most interesting of this issue's bunch. The setting is a USA whose recent history is slightly different from ours. Edith Langley, a native-born Los Angeleno, returns from the East Coast with two divorces and two daughters. She gets a house and a job, looks up her old friends and spends the first four-fifths of the book basking in the sunshine, making money and love, and going through "training" that seems to involve standing around for days saying good things about yourself. It's very Californian. There is a lot of sunshine, a lot of friendship, weather, relaxation, good food, therapy, consultation and a lot of criticism of men – who if not actually burdens on the women are at best irrelevant to them. At the end (no secret, it's in the blurb) a nuclear war starts. What follows is genuinely surprising: read it and see.

However, my main source of fascination is that the characters are so unlike me or anyone I know. It might just be that they are all so much wealthier than me – Edith drives a Porsche, buys a suit every month and sends her daughter to a private school – but I suspect that what I'm reading is a realistic description of how genuinely foreign to us the USA now is. Who are these people? Why are their concerns and conversations so different from mine? Where do they get all that spare time? Why do they wear such old-fashioned clothes, why do the women wear so much makeup, why do the men wear ties when they're not at work? Where do they get those huge cars from? Why do all the young women who are chasing after these pathetic men get taken in all the time? Why do they never talk about the things my friends and acquaintances talk about? Why do they have no politics, why are their deepest concerns and fears so alien to me? How come they can take Ronald Reagan, EST or the male menopause seriously?

I don't get this feeling from most of the American sf and fantasy I read – after all a collapsium-plated starcruiser is a collapsium-plated starcruiser in Poughkeepsie or in Peckham. Sf is, like rock music, a common frame of reference between the USA and the UK. But Carolyn See's characters, contemporaries of mine, and

despite speaking the same language, participate in a culture more remote from me than that of France, Germany or Italy. But yet, towards the end of *Golden Days*, Edith comes out and says the thing that I rarely see said in American literature these days – that she is scared of war. Almost everyone I know is scared of a war. Perhaps the Americans aren't so different after all.

(Ken Brown)

Fantasy, Etc.

There is something rather pretentious and self-indulgent about *Tegné: Warlord of Zendow* by Richard La Plante (Sphere, £4.99), although I have probably been put off by the publisher's accompanying publicity material which tells me that the author is a karate champion and is soon to star in a film of the book. This story of an unacknowledged bastard son coming to his father's country after years of training in Taoist philosophy and the martial arts does gain a great deal of credibility from the author's evident knowledge of the subjects. Perhaps there is too much relishing of the fleshly conflicts (with much detailed mayhem and gore) for a supposed philosophy of self-denial and disinterest! This may be resolved in later books in the series. I also have reservations about the foe which Tegné has to defeat. Although described as "pure evil" there is much ambivalence in the picture. Although this makes a credible temptation for the hero it does undermine the claims for a metaphysical conflict.

The evil foe in *Last Sword of Power* by David Gemmell (Century, £11.95) is certainly not ambiguous. The blood-hungry Moloch, now known as Wotan, leads his hoards against the remnants of the Roman Empire. We are in an alternative Arthurian saga: the Blood King of Britain is Uther Pendragon, who has a magic sword; his wife is known as Gian Avur; the best friend is the Lance Lord; and the young man who finally renounces violence and defeats the true enemy is Galead. Intertwined in their story are the characters of Wotan and Gilgamesh. The story is full of allusions to earlier events, although it does not claim to be a sequel to another book. The whole effect is to create an alternative legend, as though all our known stories are but poorly remembered shadows of the real thing.

Fang the Gnome by Michael Coney (Futura, £3.99) also develops an alternative Arthurian saga. Fang lives with his people on the coast of Cornwall. In a parallel world, or happentrack, Avalona and Merlin are creating the legend of Arthur which will change forever the casual brutality of the lives of Tristan and Ned Palomides. The

rationale and the mechanisms of the happentracks are rather tortuous, but the story is leavened with humour.

Ancient Dreams: The Wells of Ythan by Marc Alexander (Headline, £3.50) is about a kingdom ruled by an evil regent and invaded by sorcerous foes. Only a lost sleeping princess can save the day and it is up to a young toy-maker to journey across enemy territory and enchanted lands to find her. A slight story, which I'm afraid did not leave me looking forward to subsequent volumes.

Cat Magic by Whitley Strieber (Grafton, £3.50) is set in a small town in the mountains of New Jersey. It has many traditional ingredients for a modern horror story: small-town rivalries, a coven of witches, a mad scientist, fanatical puritans and a young woman who can see fairies. As with many stories which bring the supernatural into the realities of our world, it barely avoids the dangers of pretentiousness and paranoia. However the issues are well thought through and the episodes set in "hell" are among the most genuinely disturbing that I have read.

Disturbing horrors of a satisfactorily bloody kind are to be found in *Meat* by Ian Watson (Headline, £2.99). This present-day rural English tale of terror is a sometimes confusing mixture of dreams, visions, hysteria and destruction, but with just the right sort of nasty twist at the end. It has managed to put me off both vegetarians and butchers!

Ashar of Qarius by Clare Cooper (Simon & Schuster/Sprint, £3.50) is a science-fiction book for teenagers. Two children, from a party investigating a distant planet, return to their ship to find everyone else has disappeared. Then they discover that a strange intelligence appears to have hijacked the ship's computer. A well-written and neat working of familiar themes, with suitably positive female roles, adding up to a good introduction to the genre.

(Phyllis McDonald)

Anthologies

Terry Carr, the editor of the Best SF of the Year anthologies, died in 1987 and *Terry's Universe* edited by Beth Meacham (Gollancz, £11.95) is a collection of stories donated by some of "his" writers both in his memory and to benefit his widow. These are all new works by major writers but even so the book is a little patchy, although the good patches make it well worth skimming over the thin ones. There's a new Grey Mouser story by Fritz Leiber, if you like that sort of thing, and a thin mood piece from Ursula Le Guin, but there is also one of Carr's own best stories, "The Dance of the Changer and the Three," and a first-rate lyrical time-travel piece from Robert Silverberg, "House of Bones." The real

interzone

BACK ISSUES

All back issues except Nos. 1, 5 and 7 are still available from 124 Osborne Rd., Brighton, BN1 6LU, UK. They are £1.95 each (£2.50 each overseas). Please make your cheques or postal orders payable to *Interzone*. Contents of back issues:

- 2: "Memories of the Space Age" by J.G. Ballard; "Seasons Out of Time" by Alex Stewart; "The Third Test" by Andrew Weiner; "Angel Baby" by Rachel Pollack; "Cantata '82" by Tom Disch.
- 3: "The Dissemblers" by Garry Kilworth; "Overture for 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'" by Angela Carter; "No Coward Soul" by Josephine Saxton; "Cheek to Cheek" by Nicholas Allan; "Saving the Universe" by David Garnett.
- 4: "Calling All Gumdrops" by John Sladek; "The Caulder Requiem" by Alex Stewart; "On the Deck of the Flying Bomb" by David Redd; "After-Images" by Malcolm Edwards; "The Quiet King of the Green South-West" by Andy Soutter; "The Ur-Plant" by Barrington J. Bayley.
- 6: "Something Coming Through" by Cherry Wilder; "The Monroe Doctrine" by Neil Ferguson; "The Views of Mohammed El Hassif" by John Hendry; "Radical Architecture" by Roger Dean (art feature); "Angela's Father" by L. Hluchan Sintetos; "Kitecadet" by Keith Roberts.
- 8: "Unmistakably the Finest" by Scott Bradford; "The Electric Zoo" by Chris Jones (art feature); "Dreamers" by Kim Newman; "Strange Memories of Death" by Philip K. Dick; "Experiment with Time" by M.J. Fitzgerald; "McGonagall's Lear" by Andy Soutter; "What I Believe" by J.G. Ballard.
- 9: "The Object of the Attack" by J.G. Ballard; "The Gods in Flight" by Brian Aldiss; "Canned Goods" by Thomas M. Disch; "Synaptic Intrigue" by Richard Kadrey (art feature); "The Luck in the Head" by M. John Harrison; "Fragments of a Hologram Rose" by William Gibson; "Spiral Winds" by Garry Kilworth.
- 10: "John's Return to Liverpool" by Christopher Burns; "Green Hearts" by Lee Montgomerie; "Soulmates" by Alex Stewart; Photographs by Ian Sanderson; "Love, Among the Corridors" by Gene Wolfe; "The Malignant One" by Rachel Pollack; "The Dream of the Wolf" by Scott Bradford.
- 11: "War and/or Peace" by Lee Montgomerie; "Cube Root" by David Langford; "Fogged Plates" by Christopher Burns; "Rain, Tunnel and Bombfire" by Pete Lyon (art feature); "The Unfolding" by John Shirley & Bruce Sterling; "Kitemistress" by Keith Roberts.
- 12: "The Bob Dylan Tambourine Software..." by Michael Bishop; "Little Ilya and Spider and Box" by Paul J. McAuley; "The Fire Catcher" by Richard Kadrey; "Laser Smith's Space Academy" by George Parkin (comic strip); "A Young Man's Journey to Viriconium" by M. John Harrison; "Instructions for Exiting This Building..." by Pamela Zoline.
- 13: "The Man Who Walked on the Moon" by J.G. Ballard; "The People on the Precipice" by Ian Watson; Interview with William Gibson; "If the Driver Vanishes..." by Peter T. Garratt; "Escapist Literature" by Barrington J. Bayley; "Rhinestone Manifesto" by Don Webb; "Randy and Alexei Go Jaw Jaw" by Neil Ferguson.
- 14: "When the Timegate Failed" by Ian Watson; Interview with Clive Barker; "The Compassionate, the Digital" by Bruce Sterling; "Finn" by Sue Thomason; "Patricia's Profession" by Kim Newman; "The King of the Hill" by Paul J. McAuley; "The New SF" by Vincent Omniavertitas; "Caverns" by David Zindell.
- 15: "The Winter Market" by William Gibson; Interview with Bruce Sterling; "The One and Only Tale..." by John Brosnan; "The Vivarium" by Garry Kilworth; "A Multiplication of Lives" by Diana Reed; "Goodbye - and Thanks for the SF" by Allen A. Lucas; "The Ibis Experiment" by S.W. Widdowson.
- 16: "And He Not Busy Being Born..." by Brian Stableford; art feature by Jim Burns; "The Protector" by Rachel Pollack; "Sex Change Operation Shock" by Gwyneth Jones; "The Brains of Rats" by Michael Blumlein; "His Vegetable Wife" by Pat Murphy; "The Cup is the Wine" by Josephine Saxton; Interview with Iain Banks; "The Final Episode" by Shirley Weinland.
- 17: "Freeze-frame" by Gregory Benford; "Jingling Geordie's Hole" by Ian Watson; Interview with John Shirleys; "Sound-spinner" by D.C. Haynes; "Hard Work" by Thomas M. Disch; Interview with Gene Wolfe; "Future Fish" by Barbara Hills; "Adam Found" by Simon Ounsley.
- 18: "As Big as the Ritz" by Gregory Benford; "Screaming of the Beetle" by SMS; "Boiled Alive" by Ramsey Campbell; Interview with M. John Harrison; "Paths of Dying" by Simon Ounsley; "Fountain of Time" by Peter Lamborn Wilson; "Mind Vampires" by Greg Egan; "When Jesus Comes Down the Chimney" by Ian Watson.
- 19: "The Second Third of C" by Neil Ferguson; Interview with Gwyneth Jones; "A Dragon for Seymour Chan" by Paul J. McAuley; "The Next-But-One Man" by Kim Newman; "Assyria" by Christina Lake; "Goodbye Houston Street" by Richard Kadrey; "The Xeelee Flower" by S.M. Baxter.
- 20: "Love Sickness, Part 1" by Geoff Ryman; Interview with Rudy Rucker; "Sexual Chemistry" by Brian Stableford; "Foresight" by Michael Swanwick; "A Gift from the Culture" by Iain M. Banks.
- 21: "Krash-Bang Joe" by Eric Brown; Interview with John Crowley; "Dop*elgan*er" by Garry Kilworth; art feature by Ian Miller; "The Philosophical Stone" by Ken Wisman; "Layers of Meaning" by Brian Stableford; "Love Sickness, Part 2" by Geoff Ryman.

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BACK ISSUES: Continued from preceding page

22: "The Only One" by David S. Garnett; Interviews with J.G. Ballard and K.W. Jeter; "The Decline of Sunshine" by Cherry Wilder; "The Boys" by Charles Stross; "Memories of the Body" by Lisa Tuttle; "Among the Wounded" by Christopher Burns; "The Good Robot" by SMS; "The Girl Who Died for Art" by Eric Brown.

23: "The Giving Plague" by David Brin; "Karl and the Ogre" by Paul J. McAuley; Interview with Karen Joy Fowler; "Artefacts" by Christopher Evans; "Famous Monsters" by Kim Newman; "Something for Nothing" by S.M. Baxter; "Scatter My Ashes" by Greg Egan.

24: "The Growth of the House of Usher" by Brian Stableford; "Heartland" by Karen Joy Fowler; Interview with Thomas M. Disch; "The Time-Lapsed Man" by Eric Brown; "Animator" by Alex Stewart; "Lux in Tenebris" by Phillip Mann; "Salvage" by Julio Buck Aberra; plus Charles Platt on Britain, etc.

25: "The Long Fall Home" by Paul Preuss; "Lost Bodies" by Ian Watson; Interview with Terry Pratchett; "Babel" by Christopher Burns; Thomas M. Disch on Whitley Strieber; "Our Lady of Springtime" by Peter T. Garratt; "Blit" by David Langford; "Mirrors and Burnstone" by Nicola Griffith; plus Clute, Lowe, Platt, etc.

26: "Dark Night in Toyland" by Bob Shaw; "Wyrd Sisters" by Terry Pratchett; Interview with Leigh Kennedy; "Face Lift" by Susan Beeston; "Stop Evolution in Its Tracks!" by John Sladek; Christopher Priest disagreeing with Charles Platt; "Big Trouble Upstairs" by Eric Brown; "The Agony of Suburban Knowledge" by Johnny Black; "In the Dream-Time" by Charles Stross; plus Clute, McAuley and Stableford.

27: "Tommy Atkins" by Barrington J. Bayley; Rox Kaveney on Brian Stableford; "To the Letter" by Bob Shaw; "Before I Wake" by Kim Stanley Robinson; J.G. Ballard on his favourite sf movies; "Driving Through Korea" by Ian Lee; Interview with Kathy Acker; "An Eye in Paradise" by John Brosnan; "Soft Clocks" by Yoshio Aramaki.

28: "The Jonah Man" by S.M. Baxter; Interview with Ramsey Campbell; "Meeting the Author" by Campbell; "Twitich Technicolor" by Kim Newman; "The Outside Door" by Lyle Hopwood; "Visiting the Dead" by William King; "Chaos Surfari" by Rudy Rucker & Marc Laidlaw; plus Stableford, Platt, etc.

gem is Michael Swanwick's "The Dragon Line" which achieves the astonishing coup of finding an original twist to the Arthur/Mordred/Merlin cycle in what is also a rattling good 20th-century "green" story.

Other Edens II edited by Christopher Evans and Robert Holdstock (Unwin, £3.95) seems at first sight to be more bangs for the buck – the editorial pared down to the minimum to give room for 16 stories, including a new twist on the time travel theme from Garry Kilworth, a piece of characteristically thoughtful weirdness from Tanith Lee, a clever "Remaking History" from Kim Stanley Robinson, and Scott Bradford's "Dazzle," about a charismatic philosophical dog. Again there's the characteristic difficulty with anthologies, that the stories you enjoy will be hidden among the ones you like less, but this is definitely the one to take on holiday, a good solid batch of stories with enough diversity to be sure there will be some you enjoy.

The anthology to buy first, though, is **The Orbit Science Fiction Yearbook** edited by David S. Garnett (Futura, £4.99). It strikes the right balance of story and editorial with an introduction and two factual articles that are informative and entertaining and add to your appreciation of the stories. There are also 12 stories with scarcely a dud amongst them. It's well presented and printed and also has what was for me the best single story of the bunch, Pat Murphy's "Rachel in Love," about an aware and intelligent chimera. (Honourable mention too for Marta

Randall's "Lapidary Nights".) However, be warned: the stories here have more resonance if you read them separately rather than devouring the book at one sitting. The common thread running through them is of man dealing with the alien other – and I mean "Man," not "Mankind" – the alien other is as likely to be a dog, a construct or a computer program as a woman. If you're bookshop browsing, turn to Lisa Tuttle's extraordinary "The Wound" which sums it all up in one outrageous concept – all men are born equal, but then they fall in love and have to struggle for their manhood in a biological struggle: the loser gets to turn into the woman. It's a brilliant story and I hated it.

And finally, the title tells you everything you need to know about **The Dragonhiker's Guide to Battlefield Covenant at Dune's Edge: Odyssey Two** by David Langford (Drunken Dragon Press, £9.95 hardback), a collection of sf parodies. The shorter and more specific they are the funnier I found them, and the four best – a LOR fragment, a Dragonriders of Pern and snippets of Star Wars and Indiana Jones – occur as throwaways in the introduction. I recommend the hilariously accurate "Duel of Words," a Dune take-off, but some of the longer pieces which parody genres rather than individual authors are stretched thin. His Brother's Grimm piece shows he hasn't read much children's fiction lately – there's nothing funny about the princess refusing to marry the prince and live happily ever after in favour of

going off to the College of Sorcery to enrol as a student witch and accompanied by a non-sexist talking frog. What do you think we've been doing for the last twenty years, boys?

(Wendy Bradley)

Lisa Tuttle interview

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If I could do it. The idea of adapting one of my stories is appealing, given that I already have the material; the problem is I get prose fiction ideas, and wonder if I'm enough of a storyteller to think of an idea for a script.

Can you tell me anything about work in progress?

I'm working on a novel at the moment. It's called *Lost Futures*, and I've been saying it's science fiction. It's set in the present, there are no aliens or advanced technology, and the one science-fictional idea is that it's about alternate worlds. I told my agent this and he said, "It sounds like a New Age novel, but don't worry, that's a category in America now." Gabriel appeared from Tor in America in that category. It was published as "A Novel of Reincarnation"; and by Sphere as a horror novel. I don't consider it a novel of reincarnation, but I can't say it's a horror novel either. The New Age label hasn't come over here yet, and whether it will I don't know. Maybe *Lost Futures* will end up in that slot too.

Books Received

December 1988-January 1989

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the period specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* of the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than the title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Allen, Roger MacBride. **The Torch of Honor.** Arrow/Venture, ISBN 0-09-962180-0, 339pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1985.) 19th January.

Anderson, Poul and Karen. **The King of Ys 3: Dahut.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-07343-4, 493pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 9th February.

Anthony, Piers. **Out of Phase.** New English Library, ISBN 0-450-42930-X, 286pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987; "first of a magnificent new trilogy, it is set in the memorable worlds of the classic Apprentice Adept series"; a simultaneous hardcover edition exists [not seen].) 2nd February.

Bear, Greg. **Eternity.** Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04140-4, 399pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; a major new work, sequel to *Eon*.) 19th January.

Bear, Greg. **The Serpent Mage.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-953700-1, 343pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; sequel to *The Infinity Concerto*.) 19th January.

Blaylock, James P. **The Elf Ship.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20172-2, 379pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1982.) 8th December.

Blumlein, Michael. **The Movement of Mountains.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-43064-4, 289pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987; a first novel by a US writer who published his debut story in *Interzone*.) 2nd March.

Bova, Ben. **Vengeance of Orion.** Methuen, ISBN 0-413-17570-7, 342pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; sequel to *Orion*.) 8th December.

Brooks, Terry. **The Black Unicorn.** "A Magic Kingdom of Landover Novel." Futura/Orbis, ISBN 0-7088-8269-2, 286pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 1st December.

Brooks, Terry. **Wizard at Large.** "A Magic Kingdom of Landover Novel." Futura/Orbis, ISBN 0-7088-4001-9, 291pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 1st December.

Burkholz, Herbert. **Strange Bedfellows.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3223-7, 310pp, paperback, £2.99. (Near-future thriller, first published in the USA, 1988; it features Mikhail Gorbachev as a character.) 26th January.

Campbell, Ramsey. **The Influence.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-955910-2, 296pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in 1988.) 16th February.

Chalk, Gary, and David Kerrigan. **Creatures from the Depths: Prince of Shadows.** Two. Hodder/Knight, ISBN 0-340-42835-X, 64pp, paperback, £3.99. (Juvenile fantasy gamebook, first edition.) 19th January.

Chalker, Jack L. **Warriors of the Storm: Book Three of The Rings of the Master.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-48926-4, 336pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the

USA, 1987.) 2nd February.

Christchild, Ravan. **The Agonies of Time.** Dunscaith Publishing Ltd [28 West Lodge Ave., London W3 9SF], ISBN 1-871685-02-8, 111pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first edition; alternative-history tale in the manner of Moorcock's "Jory Cornelius" stories, by an American-born writer now resident in the UK; originally serialized in the short-lived *Vortex* magazine in 1977.) 17th February.

Clarke, Arthur C. 2061: **Odyssey Three.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20319-2, 230pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1987; sequel to 2001: A Space Odyssey and 2010: Odyssey Two.) 12th January.

Cook, Robin. **Mutation.** Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-49656-6, 367pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Near-future sf thriller, first published in the USA, 1987; proof copy received.) 23rd March.

Davies, Paul. **The Cosmic Blueprint.** Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440182-5, 224pp, paperback, £5.95. (Popular-science book about cosmology and chaos by the British physics professor and occasional sf novelist) who "must be about the best science writer on either side of the Atlantic," according to the *Washington Times*; first published in 1987.) 26th January.

Deitz, Tom. **Fireshaper's Doom.** "The magical sequel to *Windmester's Bone*." Futura/Orbis, ISBN 0-7088-8286-2, 306pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) February?

Delany, Samuel R. **The Jewels of Aptor.** Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-04445-4, 221pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1962; Delany's first novel, written when the author was 19, this appears to be a straight reprint of the 1968 revision.) 19th January.

Delany, Samuel R. **Neveryoua, or: The Tale of Signs and Cities.** "Volume two of his magnificent fantasy series." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20271-4, 544pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1983; this first UK edition appears to be revised.) 9th February.

Downer, Ann. **The Spellkey.** Futura/Orbis, ISBN 0-7088-8283-8, 240pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 19th January.

Duane, Diane. **Spock's World: A Novel.** "Star Trek." Simon & Schuster, ISBN ?, 310pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; apparently this is the first "original" *Star Trek* novel to be published in hardcover, and it has been a soaraway bestseller in the US.) 20th February.

Duncan, Dave. **A Rose-Red City.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-96119-2, 230pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987; a first novel by a Scots-Canadian writer.) 16th February.

Foster, Alan Dean. **Alien Nation.** "Based on the screenplay by Rockne S. O'Bannon." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20594-2, 217pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf movie novelization, first published in the USA, 1988.) 26th January.

Foster, Alan Dean. **Into the Out Of.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-48601-X, 376pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 1st January.

Gallagher, Stephen. **Down River.** New English Library, ISBN 0-450-49129-3, 272pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Horror/mystery novel, first edition.) 2nd March.

Gallagher, Stephen. **Oktober.** Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-49178-1, 256pp, paperback, £2.99. (Horror/mystery novel, first published in 1988.) 2nd March.

Gardner, Craig Shaw. **A Night in the Netherlands.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3196-6, 194pp, paperback, £2.99. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 26th January.

Gilluly, Sheila. **Greenbriar Queen.** Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3240-7, 310pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 26th January.

Grant, Charles L. **The Orchard.** Futura/Orbis, ISBN 0-7088-4203-8, 287pp, paperback, £2.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) February?

Graves, Robert. **The Golden Fleece.** Arrow/Arena, ISBN 0-09-960120-6, 464pp, paperback, £4.99. (Historical fantasy novel, first published in 1944; based on the myth of Jason and the Argonauts.) 2nd February.

Graves, Robert. **King Jesus.** Arrow/Arena, ISBN 0-09-960110-9, 424pp, paperback, £4.99. (Historical novel, first published in 1946; Graves's heterodox version of the story of Christ.) 2nd February.

Halam, Ann. **Transformations.** Orchard Books, ISBN 1-85213-119-5, 223pp, hardcover, £7.95. (Juvenile fantasy novel, sequel to *The Doymaker*; "Ann Halam" is a pseudonym for Gwyneth Jones.) Lote entry: published June 1988 but not received by us until January 1989.

Harris, Deborah Turner. **The Gauntlet of Malice: Book 2 of The Mages of Garillon.** Futura/Orbis, ISBN 0-7088-4047-7, 334pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) December?

Hogan, James P. **Endgame Enigma.** Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-95580-4, 408pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 19th January.

Hubbard, L. Ron. **The Doomed Planet: Mission Earth Volume Ten.** New Era, ISBN 1-870451-01-6, 339pp, hardcover, £10.95. (Sf novel, last of Hubbard's posthumous "diakology"; first published in the USA, 1987.) 15th December.

Jeter, K. W. **Death Arms.** Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20189-0, 239pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1987.) 26th January.

Jeter, K. W. **In the Land of the Dead.** Morrison, ISBN 1-870338-50-2, 204pp, hardcover, £11.95. (Horror novel, first edition [?]; a simultaneous "special edition" exists [not seen], priced at £40.) February?

Jones, Diana Wynne. **Power of Three.** Arrow/Beaver, ISBN 0-09-963620-4, 272pp, paperback, £1.99. (Juvenile fantasy novel, first published in 1976.) 2nd February.

Jones, Stephen, and Kim Newman, eds. **Horror: 100 Best Books.** Canadax, ISBN 0-947761-37-3, 256pp, hardcover, £11.99. (Critical study by numerous hands, first edition; contains short essays by Brian Aldiss, Clive Barker, Ramsey Campbell, Thomas M. Disch, Harlan Ellison, Robert Holdstock, Stephen King, Michael Moorcock, Terry Pratchett, John Sladek, Peter Straub, Ian Watson, Gene Wolfe and many others.) Publication date highly uncertain: it was originally listed for August 1986, but it still hadn't reached the bookshops by November; we eventually received a copy in early December.

Kube-McDowell, Michael P. **Isaac Asimov's Robot City Book One: Odyssey.** Futura/Orbis, ISBN 0-7088-8280-3, 211pp, paperback, £2.99. ("Shared world" sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987; a "Byron Preiss Visual Publication.") 1st December.

Lee, Taniith. **The Secret Book of Paradas I: The Book of the Damned.** Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440322-4, 229pp, paperback, £2.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1986.) 26th January.

Lee, Tanith. **The Secret Book of Paradys II: The Book of the Beast**. Unwin, ISBN 0-04-440323-2, 196pp, paperback, £2.95. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1988.) 26th January.

McDonald, Ian. **Desolation Road**. Bantam, ISBN 0-553-17532-7, 355pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; a first novel by a writer who lives in Northern Ireland.) 17th February.

MacGregor, Loren J. **The Net**. Futura/Oribit, ISBN 0-7088-8284-6, 225pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA as an "Ace Special," 1987.) 19th January.

McNally, Clare. **Come Down Into Darkness**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13034-0, 287pp, paperback, £2.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 17th February.

Newman, Kim. **Nightmare Movies: A Critical History of the Horror Film, 1968-88**. New edition. Bloomsbury, ISBN 0-7475-0295-1, 252pp, trade paperback, £12.95. (Critical study, first published in 1984; this edition is heavily revised.) 1st December.

Norton, Andre. **Trey of Swords**. "Witch World 8." Gollancz/VCSF, ISBN 0-575-04444-6, 180pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1977.) 19th January.

Platt, Charles. **Plasm**. "Piers Anthony's Worlds of Chthon." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-07428-7, 236pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1987; sequel to Anthony's Chthon and Phthor.) 8th December.

Pournelle, Jerry, and Roland Green. **Janisaries: Clan and Crown**. Illustrated by Joseph M. Martin Sauri. Futura/Oribit, ISBN 0-7088-8293-5, 383pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1982.) 19th January.

Quick, W. T. **Dreams of Flesh and Sand**. Futura/Oribit, ISBN 0-7088-8287-0, 301pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) February?

Roberts, Keith. **The Road to Paradise**. Kerosina, ISBN 0-948893-33-8, 228pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Non-sf novel by a noted sf and fantasy writer, first edition; a simultaneous "Collector's Edition" also exists, priced at £37.50 [not seen].) 26th January.

Rolston, Ken, and Graeme Davis. **Something Rotten in Kislew**. "Warhammer Fantasy Roleplay - The Enemy Within Campaign." Illustrated by Richard Dolan and others. Games Workshop, ISBN 1-869893-56-5, 120 + 7pp, hardcover, £10.99. (Fantasy gaming manual, first edition.) January.

Rosenberg, Joel. **The Silver Crown: Book Three of Guardians of the Flame**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20130-0, 367pp, paperback, £3.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1985.) 26th January.

Scott, Melissa. **Silence in Solitude**. Gollancz/VCSF, ISBN 0-575-04405-5, 313pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, ? [it says "1979" but that can't be true, since Scott is still a relatively new writer]; sequel to *Five Twelfths of Heaven*.) 19th January.

See, Carolyn. **Golden Days**. Arrow, ISBN 0-09-961760-9, 196pp, paperback, £2.99. ("Carolyn See's glorious novel is not a post-holocaust prophecy of doom..." [i.e. it is]; first published in the USA, 1987.) 19th January.

Sheffield, Charles. **Proteus Unbound**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-43116-0, 267pp, paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988; belated sequel to *Sight of Proteus*.) 5th January.

Sheffield, Charles. **Sight of Proteus**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-48903-5, 246pp,

paperback, £2.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1978.) 5th January.

Simak, Clifford D. **Brother and Other Stories**. Edited and introduced by Francis Lyall. Methuen, ISBN 0-413-17760-2, 165pp, paperback, £2.95. (Sf collection, first published in 1986; contains four stories: "Brother" [1977], "Over the River and Through the Woods" [1965], "Auk House" [1977] and "Kindergarten" [1953; already reprinted in Simak's collection *Strongers in the Universe*].) 8th December.

Sladek, John. **Bugs**. Macmillan, ISBN 0-333-09060-6, 215pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf-tinged satirical novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 27th April.

Smith, Guy N. **Mania**. Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0057-1, 234pp, paperback, £2.99. (Horror novel, first edition [?].) 5th January.

Stephens-Payne, Phil. **Eric Frank Russell: A Working Bibliography**. 2nd edition. Galactic Central [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-06-6, 31pp, paperback, £1.75. (Author bibliography, first published in 1986.) December.

Stephens-Payne, Phil, and Gordon Benson. **Jr. Cyril M. Kornbluth: A Working Bibliography**. Galactic Central [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-03-3, 28pp, paperback, £1.50. (Author bibliography, first edition.) Late entry: August 1988.

Stephens-Payne, Phil, and Gordon Benson. **Jr. James Tiptree, Jr.: A Working Bibliography**. Galactic Central [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-05-X, 20pp, paperback, £1.25. (Author bibliography, first edition.) Late entry: October 1988.

Stephens-Payne, Phil, and Gordon Benson. **Jr. Keith Laumer: A Working Bibliography**. Galactic Central [25A Copgrove Rd., Leeds LS8 2SP], ISBN 1-871133-04-1, 33pp, paperback, £1.75. (Author bibliography, first edition.) Late entry: September 1988.

Strieber, Whitely. **Catmagic**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-07448, 458pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA under the pseudonym "Jonathan Barry," 1986.) 8th December.

Tarr, Judith. **The Lady of Han-Gilen: Volume Two of Avaryan Rising**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-30320-1, 310pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 10th March.

Tepper, Sheri S. **The Enigma Score**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13373-6, 384pp, paperback, £3.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA as *After Long Silence*, 1987.) 17th February.

Tepper, Sheri S. **The Gate to Women's Country**. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-01604-1, 278pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 16th February.

Timson, Keith. **A Far Magic Shore: Book One of The Fall of the Disenchanted**. "In the tradition of Terry Brooks' Shannara trilogy." Futura/Oribit, ISBN 0-7088-4206-2, 299pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition [?]; probably a first novel [?] by an author who sounds as though he may be British - some information from the publishers would have been helpful.) February.

Turner, George. **The Sea and Summer**. "Winner of the Arthur C. Clarke Award." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20358-3, 427pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1987.) 9th February.

Vardeman, Robert E. **Weapons of Chaos: Echoes of Chaos, Equations of Chaos, Colors of Chaos**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-42854-0, 596pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf omnibus volume; the three novels it contains were first published in the USA, 1986, 1987, 1988.) 2nd March.

White, Tim. **Chiaroscuro**. Dragon's World/Paper Tiger, ISBN 1-85028-072-X, 144pp, trade paperback, £7.95. (Sf and fantasy art book, first edition; a simultaneous hardcover exists, at £14.95 [not seen].) 26th January.

Williamson, J. N., ed. **Masques**. Futura, ISBN 0-7088-4051-5, 307pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA, 1984; contains stories by Bradbury, Echison, McCammon, Wolfe, etc., and an interview with Richard Matheson.) January?

Wolfe, Gene. **Peace**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-48922-1, 246pp, paperback, £2.99. (Psychological fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1975; first UK mass-market paperback edition of a neglected masterpiece.) 2nd February.

Wolfe, Gene. **There Are Doors**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04353-9, 313pp, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986.) 2nd February.

Wylie, Jonathan. **The Unbalanced Earth Book One: Dreams of Stone**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13416-3, 363pp, paperback, £2.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; "Jonathan Wylie" is the pseudonym of Mark and Julia Smith.) 20th January.

Zindell, David. **Neverness**. Corgi, ISBN 0-246-13435-6, 444p, hardcover, £12.95. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1986; a simultaneous trade paperback exists [not seen].) 23rd February.

Inter-action

As in issue 26 of *Interzone*, we are publishing the following brief comments here in lieu of our normal readers' letters column. Most of these remarks are taken from the questionnaires which were sent to many of our subscribers with issue 27. Some are extracted from longer letters. In the questionnaire, we asked readers to comment on the stories, artwork and non-fiction in issues 23 to 26 inclusive. We also asked them to list their top five favourite sf writers - Editors.

HYSTERICAL BARM-POT

"I recently purchased a copy of *Interzone* (no. 27) for the first time, at a newsagents which hadn't previously stocked it. At last! A newish sf & mag - British - of QUALITY! You see, the only new British mags of the genre that I've seen recently have been the small-press efforts - *Dream*, *New Moon*, *Opus*. They were all filled with rip-off stories (from the 1930s and 40s, mainly) written by semi-literate morons. Worse, they were all polluted

with the writings of a hysterical barm-pot bamed Bruce P. Baker. In *Interzone* I've found a haven of good writing, intelligent and original plots, and excellent reviews, interviews, articles, etc." – Roger Elner, Ulverston.

"I'm pleased to see the quality of the bimonthly *Interzone* has not fallen with its increased frequency. And it's great to see it up on the shelves of W. H. Smith's" – Rob Freeth, Worcester.

"I find *Interzone* a fascinating magazine with a very mature outlook on sf. As an 18-year-old kid just started college, I believe that good science fiction and fantasy give me a better perspective on life and the universe in general (either that or they'll drive me crazy). Anyway, I enjoy IZ very much and I look forward to the 'How to Write SF' article. I wonder: do you have any readers who don't aspire to write?" – John McDonnell, Ireland

"IZ seemed to get quite good distribution, even in such deadends as W.H. Smith's in Banbury. Whenever I saw copies in places I religiously restocked them as prominently as possible. Maybe you should ask all readers to check their Smith's and keep the mag on view in case computer journals drift in front of it?" – Ian Watson, Northants.

STORIES, ISSUES 23 TO 26

"I would like to vote for 'The Time-Lapsed Man' by Eric Brown in your annual story contest. This I thought was the best story I've read yet, although it was pushed close by 'Big Trouble Upstairs' (also Brown) and John Sladek's 'Stop Evolution in Its Tracks'." By far the worst story so far must be 'In the DreamTime' by Charles Stross" – Paul Purcell, Leeds.

"I particularly liked David Brin's 'Giving Plague', Baxter's 'Something for Nothing', Mann's 'Lux in Tenebris', Preuss's 'Long Fall Home', Garratt's 'Our Lady of Springtime' (though it creeps a bit) and Pratchett's 'Wyrd Sisters' (humour, at last) – P. Delnon, Swanscombe.

"I liked Brian Stableford, 'The Growth of the House of Usher'; Bob Shaw, 'Dark Night in Toyland'; and Eric Brown, 'Big Trouble Upstairs' – Roy Edge, Worsop.

"I disliked Pratchett's 'Wyrd Sisters' (matter of principle: don't print bloody chunks of novel). Other than that, none especially: the weak ones fade from the memory" – C. N. Gilmore, Bedford.

"I liked 'Lux in Tenebris' by Phillip Mann (very atmospheric), and 'Dark Night in Toyland' by Bob Shaw, which was very moving. Also: 'Something for Nothing' by Baxter, 'Scatter My Ashes' by Egan, 'The Time-Lapsed Man' by Brown, 'Face Lift' by Beestlone, 'Blit' by Langford, 'The Agony of Suburban

Knowledge' by Black and 'Stop Evolution in Its Tracks' by Sladek" – Laura Truman, London.

"Ten stories particularly liked, seven stories average, eight stories particularly disliked. Issues 23 and 25 the best, issue 26 the worst" – Mike Johnson, Wakefield.

DRAW ARTWORK?

"All IZ covers are excellent – let's have more that are related to IZ stories, however. Most interior artwork is too drab, depressing or just badly drawn" – S. McGarrity, Halifax.

"The cover of issue 26 was totally inappropriate to a magazine with *Interzone*'s content. I dislike your policy of using paperback covers – get original artwork" – Trevor Jones, Huntingdon.

"I think your best artists over the last four issues have been Russ Tudor and SMS" – Graham Smith, Leeds.

"Artists liked: SMS, Russ Tudor, Tina Horner, Pete Lyon, Duncan Fegredo. Disliked: um... You may guess that I quite liked the artwork" – Keith Brooke, Beckford.

"I like SMS, and Barbara Hills in issue 25. Dislike Tina Horner, and Barbara Hills in issue 26" – Dean H. Bass, Milton Keynes.

"Although there was no art I particularly liked or disliked, I think the art could be better. It is perhaps too simple" – Iain U. Anderson, Banbury.

"Bah! Art! Use photos and treated photos instead" – Lyle Hopwood, London.

NON-FICTION, ISSUES 23 TO 26

"I find the 'Mutant Popcorn' film reviews hard going, as it's assumed you're well up on every aspect and term of films. A clearer, less flowery approach would be better" – Christopher A. Hester, Baildon.

"Best non-fiction: Karen Joy Fowler interview in IZ 23 (Paul Kincaid either asked just the right questions or Karen intuitively knew exactly what I most wanted to hear...). Charles Platt, especially on Alfred Bester. John Clute, with the exception of 'Trinities' (aargh!). I'd also like to see more letters, then there's 'Mutant Popcorn'..." – Nicola Griffith, Hull.

"Non-fiction disliked: all Charles Platt (although he would certainly be more offended if we all simply ignored him, yawn). 'Peoria My Destination!' by Christopher Priest (talk about making mountains...) – Gavin Sneddon, London.

"Charles Platt's essays – don't like his stuff, he's too bigoted" – Carol Ann Green, Hull.

"I dislike most of the book reviews. They are too relentlessly negative. Your reviewers should take a lesson from A.J. Budrys in F & SF. It is impos-

ible to be a good critic and still respect the genre" – Donald F. Robertson, San Francisco.

"I particularly like the large number of book reviews, especially the longer ones. Also the full listing of 'Books Received' promises to be very useful" – Elizabeth J. Pendleton, London.

"If one or two of the interviews were a little uninteresting, I doubt whether that is IZ's fault. People with really interesting lives or opinions are not easy to find. (Kathy Acker in issue 27 was interesting, even if gloomy)" – Stephen O'Kane, Hove.

"Why do you print the Charles Platt column? It's quite obvious that the man simply doesn't know what he's talking about. Take, for example, the way he equates Terry Pratchett with Piers Anthony, as he did in 'The Triumph of Whimsy' (IZ 27). It's an absurd comparison to make, not unlike equating John Cleese with Benny Hill" – Tony Ellis, Chelmsford.

REVOLT OF THE CLERKS

"One point which irked me was Charles Platt's juxtaposition of science-fiction readers/NASA engineers and fantasy readers/clerks. This is a very elitist outlook which offends me personally, since I am a clerk. It seems to me that Charles's attitude stems from a belief in some inherent superiority shared by all devotees of true (hard?) sf. In which case such people can simply close themselves in a ghetto while the world passes them by. This kind of snobism ignores one fact, namely that changes in outlook (such as a more enlightened attitude towards ecology-supportive technology) will not come about simply from the good will of Charles's engineers unless there is a ground swell of popular pressure – that is from the rest of us (the majority) who are not working on Star Wars projects in subservience to the Pentagon" – Michael Schembri, Australia.

"I don't believe that I'm influenced (at least not directly) by the sixties, since I wasn't born until 1970 – which, I suppose, leaves me open to Mr Platt to retort that I'm just an immature teenager who fritters away his time playing roleplaying games. It seems a little odd, not to say close-minded, that a man who probably has to respond daily to the general public's idea of science fiction ('space rookies and rayguns – like in Star Wars') will readily support the general misconception of roleplaying games. 'Dungeons and Dragons' is to roleplaying as 'Perry Rhodan' space adventures are to science fiction" – Paul Watson, Coventry.

"The trend towards fantasy began 20 years ago," states Charles Platt. Well, perhaps. The actual surge that's responsible for its current preponderance in the bookshops is of considera-

bly more recent origin: the years 1980 to 1986 were ones of unalloyed political crisis, in which the Cold War lurched back into frenzied life, new generations of more accurate and more destructive weapons were exercised on our doorsteps, and (at one point) the international peace movement brought millions onto the streets of our capital cities to protest about the threat of imminent holocaust. In such circumstances, it's not surprising that the logical speculation of sf lost out to the blatant wish-fulfilment of fantasy – for the simple reason that it's difficult to think consistently about the possible shape of the future when the prevailing socio-political context suggests that there won't even be a future. So why, during the peak years of the Euro-missile crisis, about 1983-85, had the tide of fantasy still to rise as high as it has now? Simply because it takes time – sometimes two or three years – for authors to conceive and write novels, and for publishers to print and distribute them. If this explanation for the rise in fantasy is correct, then it suggests we are already past its peak and that sf will again come into its own. With a new rapprochement between the superpowers, public concern about nuclear weapons has fallen back to its pre-1980 level. It has become possible to think seriously about the future again. The need for fantasy is over, and from now on we should be seeing a lot less of it” – Joseph Nicholas, London.

STORIES, ISSUE 27

“The Barry Bayley story in the last *IZ* was brilliant! More please” – William King, Stranraer.

“*IZ* 27 was the best issue in a long while. The Yoshio Aramaki story was a crazed masterpiece, ‘Ballard on acid.’ I enjoyed the Bayley too. What a start to ‘89!” – Eric Brown, Haworth.

“Jan Lee’s ‘Driving Through Korea’ was the surprise of the issue, a relative unknown showing the professionals how it’s done. His oblique prose style gets the story off to a strong start while the masterly misdirection throughout leaves you totally unprepared for the shock ending. The story cleverly undermines our conception of the alien. We are all strange, unknown. Only the surface veneer of familiarity convinces us otherwise. I hope to see more of Jan Lee’s work in these pages soon” – Peter Tennant, Thetford.

“‘Fiction about fiction’ is surely the worst thing ever to happen to the mainstream, excepting Jeffrey Archer of course. For once I am glad of the genre wall, if it will keep this damned stuff out. You see, personally I know that a story is just a story without the author having to tell me so; particularly not as, ah, tirelessly as Jan Lee

does in his piece ‘Driving Through Korea.’ Otherwise the Jan/Feb issue was especially enjoyable, the high points being the Bayley and Robinson” – Michael Kowalski, London.

“If you print stories such as Bob Shaw’s ‘To the Letter,’ there is certainly no chance of you becoming a non-sexist magazine” – Steve Palmer, Twickenham.

“The Barrington Bayley story in *IZ* 27 reminds one of how Moorcock grew up in his shadow – I feel sorry for our American readers who don’t understand the Great British Cockney Accent as patented by Mrs Cornelius. The Kim Stanley Robinson was a gloriously messy acid trip from start to finish. The Bob Shaw made me think of Moorcock (again) and his diatribes against Shaggy God stories in New Worlds of 1965-66 vintage. John Brosnan is too shallow for my tastes, but pleasantly accessible...” – Matt Quartermain, Bracknell.

LEAGUE TABLES

“Who are your top five ‘all-time best’ sf authors? This question is below you, Interzone. Grow up, this is a serious subject, not Top of the Pops!” – Jan Williamson, Bradford.

“I don’t like constructing league tables like this. Art is not the same as football. Besides, I would almost certainly forget someone. I always hope to be astonished by the next book I read, whoever wrote it” – Stuart Falconer, Newcastle.

“I thought ‘all-time best’ sf authors was not a decent question to ask, and then found that I had a highly arbitrary list of prejudices already sorted out in my mind up to about rank 27! First Arthur C. Clarke (surpasses Heinlein in every respect); second John Brunner (that’s right, I think he’s very underrated); third Brian Aldiss (master of all trades, Grand Master of few); fourth Algis Budrys (best short-story writer); fifth Philip K. Dick (philosophically stunning); sixth Ursula Le Guin; seventh H. G. Wells; eighth Mary Shelley...” – Cedric Knight, London.

“First L. Ron Hubbard; second Robert A. Heinlein; third Peter Anthony; fourth Brian Aldiss; fifth Arthur C. Clarke” – Simon Gifford, St Helens.

“Top five ‘all-time best’ – you’re joking, right? First Ballard; second Dick; third Priest; fourth Aldiss; fifth Watson” – Nik Morton, Gosport.

“I think this is slightly silly, but one should be helpful... Still: Dick, Silverberg, Ballard, D. G. Compton. Formerly: Heinlein (early), Asimov (sorry). The problem is, I don’t read enough sf now to replace the last two. I like Kim Stanley Robinson and several others of his generation, but tend to only have read one or two books by each” – B. J. Cox, Glasgow.

“E. C. Tubb, Douglas Adams, Peter Beere (Trauma 2020), Julian May, William Gibson (I liked Burning Chrome but not the rest)” – Shaun Pryszkak, Lancing.

“My top five enjoyable sf authors: Alan Dean Foster, Isaac Asimov, L. Ron Hubbard, Barry B. Longyear, Philip K. Dick” – N. Cansdale, Stoke.

“First Samuel R. Delany; second Joanna Russ; third Octavia Butler; fourth James Tiptree, Jr (aka Alice Sheldon); fifth Josephine Saxton” – Linda T. Duchamp, Seattle.

We print the above “league tables” here as a taster. Full results of this poll of favourite authors will be given next issue – Editors.

The Vanishing Midlist

Continued from page 50

make a tired concept seem more exciting. The only difference is that the names are of movie stars instead of authors.

So this is what our low-budget science-fiction field has become: a profit-driven personality-oriented mass-entertainment industry in which there’s little room for creativity or idiosyncratic appeal. Some of the newer writers have suffered most; many who entered science fiction in the last ten years now find themselves disillusioned, or even contemplating quitting: Rudy Rucker, John Shirley, Eleanor Arnason, Marc Laidlaw, Michael Blumlein, S.P. Somtow, Tim Sullivan. Twenty years ago, newcomers such as these might have been published in the Ace Specials series (which launched Ursula Le Guin and Samuel R. Delany among many others). Today, that option no longer exists. Ace Books recently let the “specials” lapse, complaining that the books weren’t cost-effective. Instead of spending \$300,000 on, say, sixty original novels by innovative newcomers over a period of five years, Ace would rather spend it all on one sequel to something that Arthur C. Clarke published in 1948.

Little wonder, then, that American writers are becoming dismayed by the state of their industry. Little wonder that some of them are “discovering” Europe, where book publishing is not yet so fiercely market-driven.

The only remaining question is how long Europe will remain such a sanctuary for disillusioned and disenfranchised transatlantic refugees. It seems to me that the British audience may be innately more supportive of midlist titles; but to find out, we’ll simply have to watch and wait.

(Charles Platt)



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Continued from page 4

have increased their production and are gleefully sending off stories in all directions.

And the semi-professional magazines seem to be flourishing rather than wilting in the glare of new professional competition. Take **Dream Quarterly** for instance: under a new editor, George P. Townsend, the magazine has been increasing its page-count and improving its print quality enormously. More important, it has been publishing good stories by the likes of **William King**, **Keith Brooke**, **Peter Garratt** and **Neil McIntosh** (two of these have also been published in *Interzone*; a third, **Keith Brooke**, is coming up in our next issue). *Dream* is more conservative in its editorial stance than, say, the rival fiction-fanzine *Back Brain Recluse*, but you may care to give it a try: it's £7 for four issues inland, payable to Trevor Jones, 1 Ravenshoe, Godmanchester, Huntingdon, Cambs. PE18 8DE. Tell them we sent you.

Two new American non-fiction magazines also rate a mention. The **New York Review of Science Fiction** is a professionally-produced monthly of reviews and criticism which bids fair to rival the UK's own *Foundation* or the excellent Australian *SF Review*. That is to say, its approach is highly intelligent without being heavily academic. Many of its contributors are practising novelists, and the editorial staff (which includes **David Hartwell** and **Kathryn Cramer**) is drawn from the world of publishing, literary agencies and so on rather than the universities or colleges. Subscriptions for overseas readers are \$36 to Dragon Press, PO Box 78, Pleasantville, NY

10570, USA. The other US publication I want to mention is a new fanzine, **The Book of Gold**, which is dedicated entirely to the works of **Gene Wolfe** (a worthy subject). This is edited and published by a long-standing *Interzone*-subscriber: **Jeremy Crampton**, 302 Walker Building, University Park, PA 16802, USA. I recommend that all Wolfe fanatics contact him forthwith.

(David Pringle)

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We have already been going for over seven years, and we have moved from quarterly to bimonthly publication, so early "lifetimers" bought a bargain! Lifetime subscriptions to *Interzone* now cost £100 (UK); \$200 or equivalent (overseas); \$250 or equivalent (overseas air mail). Please make your cheque payable to "Interzone" and send it to our main editorial address, shown on page 3.

Afterthought: we're thinking of beginning a new "Magazines Received" column in our next issue to accompany our "Books Received." This sort of thing:

Australian Science Fiction Review (Second Series) no. 16, September 1988. 34pp. Eds. Jenny and Russell Blackford, John Foyster, Yvonne Rousseau & Janene Webb, c/o Ebony Books, GPO Box 1294K, Melbourne, Victoria 3001, Australia. Bimonthly critical fanzine of high quality. Contributors: Cy Chauvin, Norman Talbot, Michael Tolley, etc. \$15 Australian per annum, inland; £10 (seamail) or £15 (airmail), UK (the latter payable to Joseph Nicholas, 22 Denbigh Street, London SW1V 2ER).

Edge Detector: A Magazine of Speculative Fiction no. 1, Summer 1988. 36pp. Ed. Glenn Grant, PO Box 1408, Station A, London, Ontario NGA 1X5, Canada. Irregularly-published semi-professional fiction magazine, comparable to *New Pathways* in "feel" though not as well produced. Contributors: Rudy Rucker, Paul Di Filippo, Peter Lamborn Wilson, etc. \$9 for four issues, USA and Canada; \$13 overseas (payable to "Glenn Grant").

Science Fiction Eye vol. 1, no. 4, August 1988. 88pp. Eds. Stephen P. Brown & Daniel J. Steffan, PO Box 43244, Washington, DC 20010-9244, USA. Irregular critical journal of remarkable quality; full-colour cover. Contributors: Richard A. Lupoff, Rudy Rucker, Greg Benford, William Gibson, Richard Kadrey, Bruce Sterling, etc. \$10 for three issues, inland; \$15 overseas.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

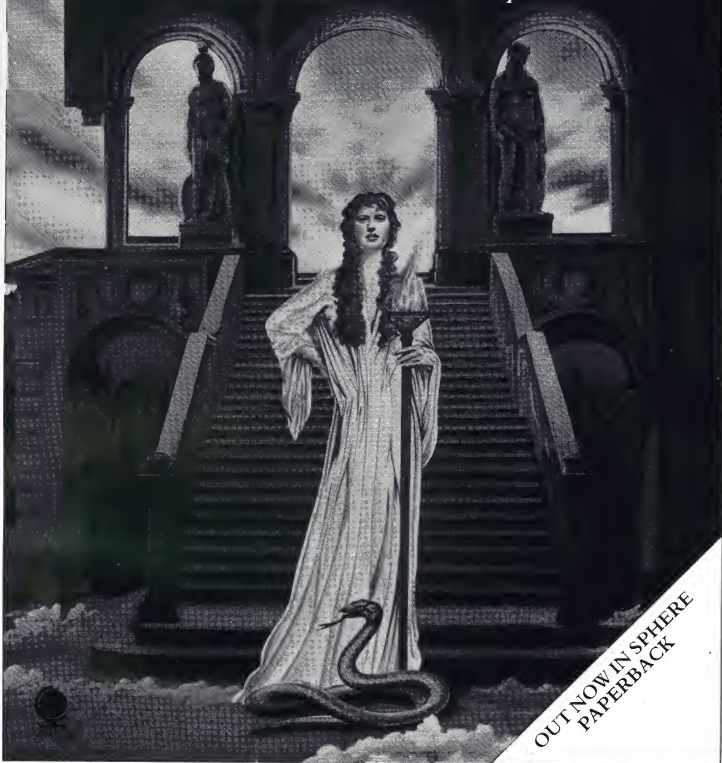
In our 30th number, June 1989: "Once Upon a Time in the Park," a zany new story by Ian Lee, an author we introduced to our readers in issue 27 – together with stories by J.G. Ballard, Lisa Goldstein, Josef Nesvadba and three new British writers. Also, we begin the promised series of critical essays on "The Big Sellers." Plus an interview with John Sladek, and all our usual features.

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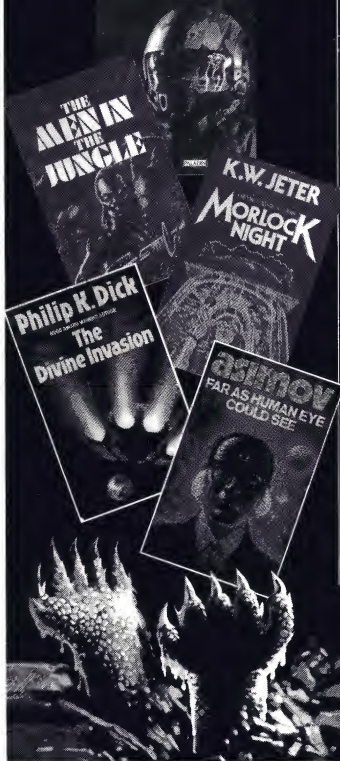
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